

MAKING NEW OF THE OLD

Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* and
its Oppositional Reinvention of
Forster, Kipling, and Conrad

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ABSTRACT

Bearing the marks of modern day satire with the evident playful revisions of Forster's *A Passage to India*, Kipling's *Kim*, and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* has since publication proved to be a compelling commentary upon the highly troublesome legacies of imperialism. Though in part concealed by an elaborate tapestry of divergent characters, extravagant settings, and bizarre incidents, the 2002 debut novel is marked by a strong agenda of postcolonial scepticism which above all has allowed Kunzru to explore the ever ambivalent themes of race and identity in the context of colonialism. However, at the heart of the resulting cultural transgressions and racial hybridity particular to the novel's protagonist, is a little disguised pattern of explicit opposition to previous authors and texts. It is this, Kunzru's striking practice of amending earlier colonial works to suit a revised and oftentimes conflicting postcolonial end, that this thesis strives to investigate by locating *The Impressionist* in relation to its literary predecessors.

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Many of the most significant works this thesis deals with were first made known to me as curriculum texts, and I am therefore grateful to Professor Tone Sundt Urstad for introducing me to them, as well as causing me to develop somewhat of an affinity for fiction offering representations of India.

Last but not least I am also indebted to all those who have contributed by maintaining a constant flow of coffee breaks, lunches, and dinners during these last few years. As well as offering a welcome break from the world of books, papers, and computer screens, you have all helped in making the long road to a completed thesis the largely enjoyable experience it in truth has been.

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INTRODUCTION

Apart from being what Daniel Mendelsohn in an early review has characterized as a ‘terrifically entertaining debut novel’,¹ Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist* has since publication in 2002 been found to be a work that offers much worthy of critical response. During the eight years that have passed academe and press alike have traced the unifying themes of race and colonialism through a maze of divergent characters, extravagant settings, and bizarre incidents with predictably compelling results, doing much to uncover an agenda of postcolonial scepticism towards the founding structures of imperialism. With the invention of a main character with the somewhat uncanny ability to pass with remarkable ease from black to white and from English to Indian, Kunzru has not only found a clever way of commenting on the power structures inherently present in colonial India as well as imperial Britain, but also a device which effectively explores the hollowness of the many racial stereotypes present in the novel’s four somewhat episodic subsections. At the heart of Kunzru’s postcolonial strategy, however, lies the little disguised use of literary ancestors, as it seems that there in the midst of racial hypocrisy, cultural hybridity, and imperial scrutiny, is a returning pattern of explicit opposition to earlier texts and authors. It is this particular practice of including aspects of other works revised to suit a mostly conflicting postcolonial end that this thesis intends to explore.

On the whole, *The Impressionist* was favourably received by the reading public. Anglo-Indian Kunzru, having been discovered by an agent with the publication of a short story in the time honoured *Granta Magazine*, soon found himself among other up-and-coming ‘multicultural’ authors such as Zadie Smith and Monica Ali. Having been removed from his

¹ Daniel Mendelsohn, ‘Karma Chameleon’, *New York Magazine*, 2 April 2002
<http://www.nymag.com/nymetro/arts/books/reviews/5843> [accessed 4 May 2009].

intermediate occupation as freelance journalist some years prior, Kunzru was following the fortunate success of his short story to pursue the novelist aspirations he had carried with him since the completion of his undergraduate English literature degree at Oxford. Before long Kunzru was trawling the archives of the British Library in search of source material for the elaborate tale of cross racial transformation that would come to be known as *The Impressionist*. Though few contemporary reviews failed to take notice of Kunzru's protagonist hero who, according to Adam Mars-Jones, is 'always at the mercy of the events'² and undergoes changes so drastic that he often escapes the grasp of the reader, the value of *The Impressionist* as a well crafted source of literary entertainment remains almost unrivalled. In general terms, Kunzru's first successful attempt at lengthy fiction was hailed as 'a remarkable book' capable of leaving a 'lasting impression',³ and today there may well not be any greater testament to its literary merit than the fact that the novel in the years since publication has found a place within selected university curriculums.

Even to the lay reader or informed enthusiast, Kunzru's novel does at regular intervals invoke a strong sense of being strangely like something else without being quite similar, and to anyone well acquainted with the English canon, *The Impressionist* is near impossible to read without feeling that Kunzru is standing on the shoulders of earlier giants, inverting, twisting, and redeveloping the well known works of highly regarded names. Owing much to the form of the picaresque, Kunzru's novel may naturally be likened to distant sixteenth and eighteenth century predecessors such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, as well as Voltaire's *Candide* and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveler*. With a view to content, however, it appears that Kunzru has made a selection among what for the most part may be considered the primary texts of colonial as well as postcolonial studies. Clearly, the cave scene present at the novel's beginning and end is indebted to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* in much the same way that the voyage up an African river in the final chapter has qualities that provide an almost unavoidable link to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In similar fashion much can also be said for the comparison of Kunzru's fifth and sixth chapters to works such as V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* as well as Shakespeare's *Othello*, and ultimately there is a great deal to suggest that benchmark texts such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*

² Adam Mars-Jones, 'East meets West', *The Observer*, 31 March 2002
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/mar/31/fiction.features1> [accessed 20 April 2009].

³ Mendelsohn.

have been highly influential as Kunzru clearly ascribes to many of the maturation story traits so strongly present within these particular works.

The Impressionist, then, is as Kunzru remarked during a 2006 interview with Frederick Luis Aldama, very much ‘a book about books’.⁴ In Kunzru’s own words the novel includes ‘a lot of fooling around with English literature dealing with India [...] as well as colonial literature more generally’.⁵ There is nonetheless seemingly little new about the games Kunzru has played with earlier works. In historical terms, the obvious presence of other works or the writing back to an established canon may in essence be traced as far back as to the Greek and Roman rhetoricians whose model of poetic production was based largely within the imitation of already established models. Though this pattern of thought remained influential during the eighteenth century, general consensus gradually came to dictate that simple copying was not enough, and that a literary work would have to ‘imitate the form and spirit rather than the detail of the classic models’⁶ in order to fulfil contemporary standards. With the publication of Alexander Pope’s *Imitations of Horace* during the 1730’s, the art of literary imitation saw further evolvment as Pope, in what may be called a series of mock translations, added contemporary references as a means to provide satirical commentary on the failings of Walpole’s administration. In a ploy to express a view on his agenda of choice and more often than not offer various forms of criticism, Pope deliberately echoed the older poet in an effort to utilize the place of the predecessor’s recognizable form in the imagination of the reading public.

In contrast to Kunzru, the majority of eighteenth century literary ‘borrowings’ were confined to verse and frequently featured a ‘satiric *persona*’⁷ addressing either the reader or a satirical accomplice. Gradually, however, changing fashions led to the rise of indirect satire which through fictional narrative would satirise its objects by ways of ludicrous characters made even more ridiculous by means of their own behaviour as well as the additional sharpening added by the author’s purposeful comments and narrative style. Voltaire’s *Candide*, of course, is an inescapable example of early prose satire with its ridicule of subjects as diverse as religion, government, and philosophy, setting a standard for what are arguably modern variants such as Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* and Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22*. In a

⁴ Frederick Luis Aldama, ‘Postcolonial Imaginings: A Conversation with Hari Kunzru’, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, 8 (2006), 110-17 (p. 114).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 8th edn (Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), p. 132.

⁷ Ibid., p. 285.

nightmarish world of mechanised devastation and war, ‘baleful, naive, or inept characters’⁸ are in these novels employed in an oftentimes absurd satirical mockery of commonly recognizable concepts such as industrial automation, capitalism, and bureaucratic reasoning, doing much to develop the comic strands already present in satire and giving rise to the use of black comedy as a satirical weapon against the social injustice that has been all too familiar to the twentieth century.

In the present day, however, the detection of one text within another commonly points to the presence of an intertextual relationship rather than the use of satire. Though its name may be recent and its usage certainly contemporary, intertextuality is in essence the younger relation of influence as well as the mark of a later generation of critics upon influence studies. With his inaugural speech at the Oxford Poetry Chair, Matthew Arnold was in 1857 among the first to advocate the importance of viewing current works in light of their earlier counterparts, voicing a programme of interpretative betterment. Holding literature to be one of the many manifestations of human life, literary deliverance could, according to the esteemed Victorian, only be attained by gaining ‘complete intelligence of its own situation’⁹ through the placing of the current in relation to that which has gone before. ‘Everywhere’, Arnold stated, ‘there is a connexion, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures’.¹⁰

Even in the eighteenth century Laurence Sterne had brought attention to the potential pitfalls associated with originality, pondering whether literary production would always be a matter of ‘twisting and untwisting the same rope’,¹¹ but with the increased interest in the discovery of a practice that would allow commonplace reference to be distinguished from genuine influence, looking to literary precursors had become an important method of evaluation. Writing, of course, had in one sense always been a way of adapting, transforming, and referring to other texts, yet it was not before the rise of nineteenth century historicism and its comparative methods that the practice of ‘tracing influences’¹² began to take on its contemporary form. By the mid twentieth century, however, the notion of literary influence as a purely author-centred concept was subjected to considerable debate. The scope of influence,

⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹ Matthew Arnold, ‘On the Modern Element in Literature’ in *Essays, Letters, and Reviews by Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Fraser Neiman (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 310.

¹² Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 5.

as it were, became enlarged as studies gradually began to address not only the presence of old texts in the new, but also how this became evident to the reader and interacted in the conveyance of textual meaning. Influence studies had, in short, become intertextual.

Though the term intertextuality is generally recognized as being very much the brainchild of Julia Kristeva, it is an inescapable fact that her work on intertextuality is much indebted to the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin. Though Bakhtin may have been approaching the end of his life by the late 1960's when Kristeva found her way to France following a degree in linguistics, his work was yet to embark on a life of its own bringing new ideas to the table in the wake of New Criticism. At the heart of the essay collection *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* were the chapters 'The Bounded Text' and 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', both exploring and evolving the work of Bakhtin. Building on the semiotic heritage of Ferdinand de Saussure, the textual semiotics of Kristeva were first and foremost an attempt to approach literary texts, and most importantly the novel genre, by means of semiotic devices of which intertextuality was a procedure by which this could be accomplished. The model of understanding Kristeva was to lean on so heavily consisted mainly of the idea that the 'literary word' did not have a set meaning. Rather, the meaning of a text at any given point in time was the product of, as Kristeva puts it, 'a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee [...], and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.'¹³ The role of the author, in Kristeva's view, was to combine these writings and amalgamate them into new texts. History and society would thus come to be reduced to mere 'text' in the mind of the author, and his or her role remained simply to insert him or herself by rewriting, by time after time allowing a signifying structure to stand 'in relation or opposition to another structure'.¹⁴ Textual meaning, then, would come to be produced as these relations in due course became apparent by the process of signifier identifying signified. To Kristeva's thinking, texts should be deemed intertextual rather than 'intersubjectual' because the subjects they include would always be inseparable from the context in which they formerly appeared, and to the writer, this context would accordingly consist only of other texts. Or to rephrase: subjectivity communicated textually would become intertextuality. Because individual texts to Kristeva appeared as entities seemingly void of separate meaning, the contextualising qualities of her intertextual semiotics appeared all the more important, allowing, as they did, for literature to emerge as an interdisciplinary exchange within a social historic framework.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 65.

¹⁴ Ibid.

In similar fashion to Kristeva, Roland Barthes also went a long way in arguing for a language based textual approach. *Image - Music – Text*, Barthes' famous essay collection of the late 1970's, heralded the rise of the reader as the new champion of the search for literary meaning, reducing the author to a figure whose role remained little other than to 'mix writings'¹⁵ or to reproduce past text in a deceptively new guise. With this, Barthes claimed, the reader's position as the only true catalyst of inter-text became clear, being able, unlike the author, to hold together 'the traces by which the written text is constituted.'¹⁶ The intertextual, the 'text-between of another text', the 'quotations without inverted commas',¹⁷ Barthes argued, made up a system of signs that may well have been constructed by an author, yet the deciphering of these signs, matching likely signifiers to signifieds, remained the task of the reader. It was the 'the stereographic plurality', as Barthes put, of this 'weave of signifiers'¹⁸ that went on to create the links in the mind of the reader to what Kristeva would call inter-texts. Central to this reader oriented approach, though, lay the question of how a reader was to limit, or in more practical terms, 'make sense' of the interpretative possibilities that lay before him. Text was not, according to Barthes, 'a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning',¹⁹ but rather a vast field of prospective interpretative options. To the thinking of Barthes, texts would become inter-texts to each other, gradually evolving an increasing number of semiotic links, in due course leaving the would-be reader with an unknown quantity of interpretative options, all posing as satisfactory routes to literary meaning.

In spite of her influential semiotics, Kristeva's language based approach to textual relations gradually came to be contested by the 1980's, and with the appearance of Michael Riffaterre's *La Production du Texte* in 1979, intertextuality came to take on a more practical form. Providing what one might call a hermeneutic slant on intertextuality, Riffaterre found a place somewhat in opposition to his critical predecessors, first and foremost because he rejected the idea that textual significance could be explained by means of linguistic structures, claiming much like Barthes that 'literary phenomenon can be described as the relationship between text and reader, not the relationship between author and text'.²⁰ With Riffaterre, literary texts emerged as rich hunting grounds for intertexts, but more importantly the number of intertexts potentially present within this approach called for a way of distinguishing the supposedly intertextual from the properly intertextual. Attempting to separate the intertextual

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 146.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁰ Michael Riffaterre, *Text Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 90.

reference from its lesser siblings, Riffaterre put forth a set of remarkably simple definitions allowing for a division based purely on communicative function. Although often deceptively similar, the intertextual reference did, according to Riffaterre, differ largely from simpler forms such as quotation and allusion in that the lesser reference would supply an almost literal key to interpretation, while the intertextual reference would produce only an interpretative clue forcing the reader to find its meaning within the intertext referred to. Concerning the intertexts themselves, Riffaterre added a further distinction categorizing them as either determinate or aleatory - the former referring to intertexts that are present almost beyond doubt and the latter referring to those that are clearly present but not limited to a specific intertext. The indeterminacy of the aleatory form led Riffaterre to the conclusion that readers may come to be aware of intertexts without any further notions of what they may be simply because something appears to be missing, or because the texts may contain 'gaps that need to be filled'.²¹ These 'gaps' lead into intertextuality itself, as their function, though somewhat generalized, was to alert the reader to the fact that the text at hand could be supplemented by others in order to gain a heightened understanding.

Elaborating on the already established theories and appearing before the English translation of Riffaterre, Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* did in 1982 bring to the table a final significant theoretical model, borrowing the name of Kristeva's term to name a derivative form of his freshly coined 'transtextuality'. All-encompassing in concern and somewhat in opposition to the foregoing, 'narrower' models, this term did, according to Genette, include all matters that set 'the text in relationship, either obvious or concealed, with other texts.'²² The virtues of Genette's criticism opposed to his predecessors, it appeared, could primarily be traced to the fact that that transtextuality, unlike previous approaches, was created with the intention of mapping virtually every aspect of textual relations, not merely, as the majority of others did, the strictly semiotic or referential. To many purposes Genette's enquiry may have been, as also Richard Macksey has duly observed, 'a mine of hypertextual games',²³ yet precisely the multitude of categorization which ensued was in many ways also Genette's prime contribution to the field of intertextual

²¹ Michael Riffaterre, 'Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive', in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 56-78 (p. 57).

²² Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 1.

²³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xvi.

study as it served to amend the focus of the intertextual debate by introducing to the discussion elements of the printed text not previously considered.

To Genette, the term he referred to as intertextuality became descriptive of little else than the presence of specific quotations, plagiarisms, and allusions, concepts discernable from each other only by their way of referring to other texts more or less explicitly. Within transtextuality itself, Genette's contribution was most importantly the paratextuality term, as it attempted to bring almost every aspect of the printed text into contention as a source of interpretative influence. The nature of the textual relations described by paratextuality were generally speaking 'less explicit and more distant'²⁴ than those of Genette's 'transtextual' intertextuality as they were deemed to be 'threshold elements'; features which were in place primarily to control the reception of the reader yet that did not constitute a part of the written work as such. It was, however, these elements which in due course came to be referred to as 'paratexts' because they broadly speaking encompassed all forms of text that were not included within the literary discourse itself, but which still remained integral to the printed product. Paratexts could, as Genette phrased it, be 'a title, a subtitle, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords' or 'marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets'.²⁵ In short, anything one might hope to find on, as well as within, the covers of a contemporary critical edition. Most significantly, the central argument of paratextuality was that the reception or rather interpretation of a reader is not influenced by the literary text alone. Remarks such as those made in introductory essays, more trivial matters such as biographical information concerning the author, or simply the message conveyed by basic footnotes (when indeed they are taken notice of) were all, according to Genette, integral to the formation of a reader's conception of a given literary work, in greater terms suggesting that the study of textual relations should not be limited to certain facets of intercourse, but might rather be concerned with all aspects of the phenomenon of textual interconnectedness – intertextual or otherwise.

The main undertaking of this thesis, however, is not intended to be a discussion of Kunzru's legacy to satire, nor is it intended to be a discussion of intertextuality as a concept. Satire, though of relevance, does in the present context do little more than place Kunzru within a tradition of oppositional literary borrowing, and while influence studies and of course intertextuality have provided a theoretical framework that goes a long way towards explaining how for instance satire in general as well as *The Impressionist* conveys its oppositional

²⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

meaning to the reader, they are both somewhat peripheral to the focus of this thesis. What is to follow in the main chapters of this thesis may first and foremost be characterised as a text oriented comparative reading, yet as an aid to this reading and as basis for the study Kunzru has made of earlier texts, the theories of intertextuality are important for several reasons.

Firstly, the works of Kristeva and Riffaterre allow a framework for this thesis as they indicate the importance of the colonial texts to Kunzru's undertaking of postcolonial opposition. When placed within the context of Kristeva's now 'classic' intertextuality, the role of these works are highlighted as the greater meaning of the text, in Kunzru's case the strong postcolonial critique, is closely linked to the contexts of the works he invokes and opposes, placing the signification of their presence centrally within Kunzru's project of oppositionality. With his games of revision, Kunzru has in Kristeva's terms demonstratively inserted both himself as a writer but also, of course, *The Impressionist* into a world of 'text' inextricably linked to history and society by rewriting not only the texts themselves, but also by exposing them to what one may call a second contextualization. The subjects of the past works may be inseparable from the context in which they appeared, yet as is clearly demonstrated with Kunzru, these contexts can by means of what Kristeva might call an intertextual dialogue be placed in opposition to the current cultural context to which Kunzru, following Kristeva's reasoning, is bound. In the case of *The Impressionist*, Kunzru's oppositional postcolonialism becomes semiotically linked to the inherent colonialism of his precursors, indicating the elevated importance of the English colonial canon to Kunzru's curious reworkings. When viewed in light of Riffaterre's theories, this emphasis is repeated as what may be considered the primary colonial texts, namely *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness*, are consequently the only ones which appear to fulfil Riffaterre's definition of determinate intertexts. This thesis will accordingly be limited to a discussion of *The Impressionist* in light of these three works.

Secondly, Barthes and again Riffaterre are significant because they shed light on the mechanisms that in the first place have brought attention to the presence of the elder texts within *The Impressionist*. Quite clearly, there are 'gaps' within Kunzru's text that readers unknowingly will try to bridge, but they invariably attempt to do so on the basis of interpretative clues present in the text itself. The detection of these 'gaps' is the first step towards discovering the intertextual relation, and in the case of Kunzru also the first step towards mapping the oppositional use of the present intertexts. The unavoidable presence of comparative elements in what is to follow will consequently serve as an initial guide to these interpretative clues, in due course leading into the discussions of these textual elements as

devices of opposition in light of relevant postcolonial theory as well as selected studies of Forster, Kipling, and Conrad.

Lastly, Genette's contribution to this undertaking is the emphasis on the paratextual and the significance of the information the reader can infer from sources other than the actual text itself, stressing that every aspect of *The Impressionist* may come into contention as a feature of Kunzru's oppositional project. Selected settings, names and other lesser details, it seems, have all contributed to the linking of Kunzru's novel to its earlier counterparts, and accordingly these will be included in the following when indeed they prove relevant.

The remainder of this thesis, then, consists of three chapters, each dealing with *The Impressionist* alongside the respective sections of *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness* that have yielded to Kunzru's oppositional strategy. The older texts will, in a sense, be inserted into the new, retelling *The Impressionist* with the assistance of its intertexts in an attempt to uncover the ways in which Kunzru has been able put seemingly complementary features to a conflicting use, writing, as he has, in opposition to the colonial authors of the English canon as well as imperialism itself.

I. FORSTER:

A UNITY OF CAVES

As favoured subject of criticism for many decades, the presence as well as symbolism of E. M. Forster's Marabar Caves has proven to be a proverbial treasure chest of interpretative meaning. Though their role as plot devices may be unrivalled as they provide the setting of the pivotal cave incident, their significance has at most times been a subject of extensive controversy. While they to many have stood as the premier example of Forster's ability to place the reasoning western mindset in opposition to the oftentimes indeterminate and incomprehensible mysticism of 'the orient', postcolonial criticism, spearheaded by Edward Said, has advocated that they by virtue of their place within a colonial discourse must not be considered examples of western centred enlightenment, but rather as an oppressive medium of domination closely related to the rule that operated colonialism itself.¹ In *A Passage to India*, the Marabar Caves are venue to one of the greatest muddles of literary Anglo-Indian, a site that is highly illustrative of the difficulties relating to the unavoidable but threatened 'binary divide between coloniser and colonised',² but paradoxically, much as the Mosque of Aziz and Mrs. Moore, also a place of temporary unification where belief, race, and mankind are seemingly brought together inside dark confines. Particularly in terms of imperialism, the significance of the Marabar Caves is therefore decidedly ambiguous. Though they initially allow for a remarkably close liaison between the colonizing and the colonized population of Forster's fictional Chandrapore, they in similar fashion cause almost inconsolable separation. As much as this evident duality allows the successful development of Forster's plot, it simultaneously lays open a range of elements well suited to postcolonial revision, because

¹ Robert C. J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2001), p. 383.

² Peter Morey, 'Postcolonial Forster', in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 254-73 (p. 256).

Forster's portrayals of the main incident are as ambiguous as their potential meanings. Accordingly, the presence of an Indian cave not dissimilar to the Marabar in the opening sections of *The Impressionist* cannot be thought coincidental as it clearly signals an agenda of postcolonial opposition, a desire to further develop Forster's commentary upon colonial relations, but above all a wish to revise key aspects of Forster's texts in a playful spirit to suit an alternative end, daring to say, it would appear, much of that which Forster did not with *A Passage to India*.

Indeed, the single and most apparent strain of ambiguity present in Forster that *The Impressionist* appears to counter the most significantly, is the great uncertainty which surrounds the events that occur once Adela Quested has entered one of the higher caves by herself. A scene that provides Forster's novel with the greater part of its mystery as well as turning point, the experiences of Miss Quested have become well established as a highly popular subject for speculation, and as Kunzru has proved, an event which yields easily to many forms of adaptation. In spite of the novel's more explicit earlier drafts, not even Forster claimed to know what really took place in the caves. Repeating adamantly that, to him, the unknown entity within the Marabar was 'either a man, or the supernatural, or an illusion',³ Forster never faltered from this stance of inconclusiveness during his lifetime. In the final version, the view of the author remained the view of the text as the pages of *A Passage to India* omit any conclusive description of Adela's experiences within the cave. While much is suggested and few scenarios withheld from the speculations of the character cast, this scene stands apart as the single event that Forster does not describe directly, yet which strikingly is the one that is the most crucial to the novel as a whole, and also the one which has offered Kunzru the most promising prospect of engaging Forster, to borrow a term from John Thieme, in a 'combative relationship'⁴ of discourse.

The use of the cave as a symbol has roots, as most critics who have studied the phenomenon are eager to point out, that extend much further back than the texts in question. As Louise Dauner rightfully points out in her benchmark essay 'What Happened in the Cave? Reflections on *A Passage to India*', there is 'another cave which has left its mark on our imaginations, Plato's cave, in the seventh book of *The Republic*.' This, according to Dauner, 'is the cave of Illusion, where "reality" is merely the shadow of a shadow, for the objects that

³ Brenda R. Silver, 'Periphrases, Power, and Rape in *A Passage to India*', in *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*, ed. by Peter Childs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 363-76 (p. 364).

⁴ John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 1.

cast the shadows are themselves artificial.’⁵ In Plato, the cave brings with it a strong sense of existential uncertainty, a notion that the dark, cool confines of a mountain chamber in some way can turn the world on its head, resigning past notions of certainty to a future of indeterminacy. It is these aspects, the elementary symbolic traits of Plato, which Forster has used to great advantage with the cave setting of *A Passage to India*, and which Kunzru in due course also has strived to at least partially appropriate. Where, as Dauner suggests, Plato’s cave also underlines ‘other symbolic implications of Forster’s cave’,⁶ much the same is true of Kunzru’s as the primary facet of the textual link that binds *The Impressionist* to Forster resides for a greater part in the use of what to most purposes is derived Platonic cave symbolism. In the hands of Forster, the cave of Plato reappeared as a colonial amendment of its former self, yet a second and even more radical wave of redevelopment is evident with *The Impressionist* as referring so explicitly to Forster’s text, the inherent colonialism of *A Passage to India* is surpassed by Kunzru, placing many of the still familiar elements in a highly recognizable yet largely changed context.

More than anything else, Forster’s contribution to the tradition of the cave symbol was one of oriental mysticism. The original theme of the cave as a meeting place of imagination and reality came to be blended with a mix of Indian philosophy and myth, orientalising, as it were, the platonic cave, and making for a wide range of symbolic resonances which are all invoked with the events that famously take place in the Marabar Hills. Drawing on personal experiences from his two stays in 1912-13 and 1921, Forster was able to create a cave in which ‘western rationality and oriental intuition’⁷ clashed in an unprecedented scene of agitated confusion, religions echoed one another, and all the world in a moment of clairvoyance came to be mirrored by the interior of an Indian mountain. It is precisely this aspect of Forster, the rich extended symbolism of the Indian cave itself, which Kunzru utilises in the very first pages of *The Impressionist*. With Kunzru, the narrow gauge railway line and elaborate expedition party may no longer be present, and gone are also the hills themselves, but in their place, though, is a man on a horse who, though part of a different setting, is unknowingly following the same cave bound path as Forster’s Marabar expedition. For as Ronald Forrester⁸ in the opening pages of *The Impressionist* travels through the barren desert

⁵ Louise Dauner, ‘What Happened in the Cave? Reflections on *A Passage to India*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 7 (1961), 258-70 (p. 262).

⁶ Ibid., p. 263.

⁷ Ibid., p. 262.

⁸ Apart from providing an amusing pun, the surname of this character appears to be a phonic anagram of that of E. M. Forster. Though not immediately purposeful in any other way than to establish a further link to the earlier

landscape, he is not only moving towards one of the novel's more central events, but he is also, in a sense, closing in on the reinvented cave of Forster and Plato.

This first of Kunzru's characters creates the distinct impression of being a man who has not yet found his place in life. Seeking salvation in the colonies, he is 'looking for something', but he is 'not sure what'.⁹ Perhaps, like Adela Quested, Forrester is searching for the 'true' India, Indian-India rather than the Anglo-India he has become accustomed to. He rides through the masses of sand looking for 'something to fill a gap', (p. 4) although he appears to have little idea what the gap may be, and even less what might be able to fill it. Just as Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested who 'had felt nothing acutely for a fortnight' and were feeling as if they 'had lived more or less inside cocoons',¹⁰ Forrester appears to be in search of anything that will bring him satisfaction in the same way that the planting of trees had done before. A product of Kunzru's satirical twists, Forrester, the lone western colonizer on a mission, is not assigned to any projects in aid of imperial rule or tasks that might facilitate any aspects of colonial enterprise, but rather on a journey he, despite a sense of disillusionment, hopes will provide nothing other than a tranquil escape from the monotony of his hill-side existence. Playing havoc with well established stereotypes, the first character Kunzru introduces to his reader is one who appears emblematic of colonial enterprise, yet in truth is quite the opposite. Forrester is not a man driven by the excitement of exploration or the warlike conquering of a foreign land, but rather by the search for something that will bring peace to his one track mind, an entry fit for the 'plus side of the balance sheet' (p. 5) that will rival the comfort he so far has found in his work with trees. Almost the foil of the quintessential colonial explorer, Kunzru's character is above all a figure overtaken by a personal mission, a mission that might, quite comically, uncover something that will free him from his 'military-march-time dreams' (p. 4) of trees, but also provide relief from the warm red dust of the desolate landscape. In stark opposition to the never faltering likes of Ronny Heaslop and McBryde, Forrester emerges as a man who struggles to uphold the appearance of an authoritative colonizer, and as a man who has lost a vital sense of determination and direction. Much a figure of colonial ridicule, the Englishman on horseback is, in short, Kunzru making tracks to oppose the first of many imperialist role models.

novel, the phenomenon proves exemplary of the style of 'borrowing' Kunzru has adopted for the majority of his postcolonial revisions.

⁹ Hari Kunzru, *The Impressionist* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 4. Further references to this work will be given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 124.

As Forrester steadily approaches the cave and spots a party of men on the horizon, Kunzru gradually begins the task of mirroring selected aspects of Forster's extended imagery. The scorching heat is about to give way to the summer rains, 'above him the sky is smudged by blue-black clouds, pregnant with the monsoon which will break any day'. (p. 3) Water, the substance that, according to Wilfred Stone, in the context of the Marabar stands as a symbol of life itself, is invading Forrester's barren world of red, hot sand. Providing a tentative link to Forster as well as the common cave in the distance, the rain that falls in *The Impressionist* is, when viewed in relation to *A Passage to India*, a premonition of the events that are shortly about to unfold:

Water, the source and sustainer of all life, rises to the heavens, falls upon the earth, and enters the bodies of the men, of animals, and of plants, all of which are ultimately one interpenetrating environment. Water also symbolizes blood and milk, the basic sustaining and nourishing fluids of life. [...] Water in its season conquers the ravishing sun, even as the sun in its strength sucks up water.¹¹

A power stronger than even the sun itself is about to take hold of Forrester. Where Forster's imagery only poses suggestions, Kunzru leaps to poignantly elaborate upon the symbolic connotations to which his literary predecessor only vaguely alludes. There is no rain in a *Passage to India* and scarcely even water, yet the implications of release and unity are common to both texts. Forrester wills the rain to come, and indeed it does, 'tearing out of the sky like blood from an open wound' (p. 12) and soaking English and Indian alike. Perhaps the lone Englishman hopes it will bring with it a sense of resolution, an escape from what has been before, or possibly the prospect of a more hopeful future. Yet in this future lies something entirely different to what he expects, for implied by the presence of the water is also the birth of something new, the formation of a new combined whole emerging from deep within the hot sand and cool water of the floods; a force that will bring together and create a blend of formerly opposed entities:

Fire and water. Earth and air. Mediate upon these oppositions and reconcile them. Collapse them in on themselves, send them spiralling down a tunnel of blackness to re-emerge whole, one with the all, mere aspects of the great unity of things whose name is God. (p. 6)

Again fulfilling the predictions of Forster's imagery, Kunzru allows the water to take on a physical function, removing the Englishman from the prior world of heat and dust he has become accustomed to. Taken by a flood of monsoon rain and liberated of the few worldly

¹¹ Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 314.

possessions he had taken with him on his journey, he is separated from his former self as he is about to be born again by the violence of a changing Indian season. Just as for the Hindu rajah who built the 'Tank of the Dagger' to commemorate his release from the weapon with which he had murdered his sister's son,¹² water is a source of release to Forrester, and as he becomes entirely engulfed, Kunzru again recalls Forster though now by means of Forsterian spirituality.

The forces in play are given a name. It is not the Indian lands, not nature, but for the time being it is Christianity itself. Submerged in the 'great unity of things whose name is God', the water towers over Forrester as if 'propelled downwards [...] by a great hand', and when he looks up from the futile business of wrestling in place a loose tent peg, 'the huge white wall' (p. 12) which appears in front of him is the wrath of the Lord resigning him to his fate. Forrester, the white colonizing man is a thing of the past, and all that is left is a 'torrent of white water rushing down a mountain', with the Englishman's future 'suspended in it like the tree trunks and thick red mud it has swept off the hillside'. (p. 12) Faced with a raging India, Kunzru's character has come to share some of the religious convictions of Mrs. Moore, yet adding to this, with the presence of Amrita, also a second strain religious symbolism is introduced. Inside her palanquin, the orphaned daughter of the murdered moneylender receives a sign of her own, for just as Manu the first man, she cups her hands to see 'a little fish flip and curl in the rainwater' (p. 11) and instantly knows that she shall 'float on the ocean and be saved'. (p. 10) Unmistakably, the fish is also a Buddhist fertility symbol,¹³ a feature which allows Kunzru to add to the already prominent symbolic implications of the water, and one that also does something to assure the reader that Amrita and Forrester, just as Miss Quested and Dr. Aziz, are before long to be united in a cave. Just as that of Forrester, Amrita's body surrenders to the watery masses, and at the moment when all appears to be lost, when all the earth seems to have been drowned in a tidal wave of brown water, salvation is found in the mouth of a cave. With Kunzru allowing water to revert to air, and Forrester reaching the top of a slope, *The Impressionist* unites with *A Passage to India*, as two characters - one female and male, one Indian and one English - find themselves within the confines of a dark stone chamber.

Stumbling upon rescue in the hollow core of a mountain, Forrester and Amrita are reborn as ancestral beings - as remnants of an ancient past. The confusion and upheaval of the

¹² Forster, p. 168.

¹³ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. by Joseph Campbell (New York: Meridian, 1964), p. 131.

outside world has been replaced by a tranquil, dark stillness, and it is as if the past has been forgotten. There is only the present, an illusion of their former selves, and a cave:

They are older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. [...] They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them 'uncanny' suggests ghosts, and they are older than all spirit.¹⁴

With Forrester becoming convinced that he has died and that the creature tugging at his arm is some sort of apparition, the common significance of Forster's imagery becomes increasingly apparent. For as Forster's description of the Marabar underlines primarily the nature of the caves themselves, Kunzru builds on the very same sense of 'primevalness' to capture the meeting of his two characters. One element after the other, that which is only indicated by the suggestiveness of *A Passage to India* is transformed into actual occurrences in *The Impressionist*, for where Miss Quested and Aziz simply make their way up the hills in orderly fashion, Forrester and Amrita are almost flung into a cave by a torrent of water, stripped of their worldly selves, and reverted to primeval beings. With Kunzru, there is a sense that one is no longer dealing with a particular cave, particular beings, or a particular place and that Forrester and Amrita are, in a way, taken out of their age and placed back at the dawn of time. To Stone, caves are the 'archetypal picturing of life's origin',¹⁵ and as Forrester and Amrita find themselves in the presence of one another, the well established prophesy of unification looms more powerfully than ever. Forrester enters the dark space. There is 'the touch of fingers' and the appearance of a fire. It is as if the cave itself has drawn him into its depths and refuses to release him:

They are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit; the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished. The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible.¹⁶

¹⁴ Forster, p. 116.

¹⁵ Stone, p. 301.

¹⁶ Forster, p. 116.

As Forster's powerful images attempt to unite, so do Kunzru's characters. It is Forrester who breathes air and Amrita, the cave's imprisoned spirit, who breathes stone. In Buddhism, 'the living process is likened to a fire burning', and the 'goal of the techniques of the Buddhist therapy is to bring this process [...] to a stop'.¹⁷ If the fire is extinguished, nirvana has been achieved, and the Buddha is separated from the illusions of life. But still Forster's flame and Kunzru's fires have not been extinguished and are still burning; as they battle with each other in the dust of the cave floor, both English man and Indian woman are still in possession of their earthly desires; as black and white, the 'two poles of a world' in 'perpetual conflict',¹⁸ they engage in battle on the cold stone floor.

With the encounter of Amrita and Forrester, the alluring similarity of *The Impressionist* makes a firm turn for opposition as it from this point on appears set on making explicit what the cave scene of *A Passage to India* only suggests. Much like the first pages of *The Impressionist*, the initial chapters of *A Passage to India* do much to foreshadow the impending, crucial, cave incident and induce a sense that something will go amiss when Adela later enters the cave by herself. The unavoidable presence of Forster's symbolism aside, one may look to occurrences such as, for instance, the similar experiences of Mrs. Moore in one of the lower caves when she has a panic attack convinced that 'some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad',¹⁹ still, in terms of Kunzru's elaborations, one of the most significant aspects of Forster's text remains that which, though initially present, was not included in its final manuscripts. As Brenda R. Silver points to in her study, the earlier versions were much more explicit concerning the incident in the cave as Adela does not just have an unknown experience, but is instead the subject of an attack: 'An assault definitely occurs: the reader is in the cave with Adela and feels the hands that push her against the wall and grab her breasts; we too [as readers] smash the assailant with the field glasses before running out of the cave and down the hill.'²⁰ Though the identity of Miss Quested's attacker remains unresolved, the gravity of the attack, quite clearly, does not. The omission in Forster's final edition of Miss Quested's actual experiences confirms the suspicion of attack which in *A Passage to India* appears to have encouraged from the very outset, and it is this, combined with Forster's inherent ambiguity suggesting that something

¹⁷ Zimmer, p. 472.

¹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 44.

¹⁹ Forster, p. 137.

²⁰ Silver, p. 364.

more did happen in the cave, that Kunzru has taken as basis for the events which take place in his own, reincarnated cave.

Once it has been introduced, Kunzru, it seems, no longer relies solely upon the symbolic implications of the cave alone, but also upon the strong stigma that is associated with sexual relations between the differing races. What Frantz Fanon refers to as the 'sexual myth' of the 'quest for white flesh',²¹ the attraction that is perpetually present between alienated races and that marks the English constituent of Forster's cast as inherently sceptical towards any sort of relation between their own women and Indian men, clearly provides basis for Kunzru's elaborations. A striking example in *A Passage to India*, of course, can be found with Adela's intended husband Ronny Heaslop, as he on several occasions is very reluctant to sanction any Anglo-Indian contact beyond the strictly necessary. In one instance, when he discovers Adela alone with Aziz and Godbole, he rebukes Fielding for having allowed an English girl to be 'left smoking with two Indians',²² and on a later occasion, when the planned expedition has become common knowledge, Ronny is again the voice of caution when he warns that 'Aziz would make some similar muddle over the caves'²³ - just as he had when rashly inviting the English ladies to visit him in his home. The racial tension of Forster's novel is, quite clearly, tangible. What appears to be a fear of Ronny Heaslop's for what might happen if even highly regarded Indians such as Aziz are allowed too many liberties in the presence of English women, and a factor that contributes to the suggestiveness of the cave event, can, as Peter Morey argues, be traced to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. According to Morley, *A Passage to India* ascribes to a 'discourse wherein white women are sexually threatened by brown men', with the result that 'when the British of Chandrapore discuss the alleged rape they do so in terms that recall an earlier experience of women coming under threat.'²⁴ In light of this it would seem that almost by definition, any setting which allows an Indian man to be alone in the presence of an English girl is potentially hazardous, and any event that could be construed as threatening will be blamed on the Indian almost regardless. At the trial, when asked to account for the morning of the picnic, McBryde, the police superintendant, confirms much of the basis for Heaslop's suspicions:

²¹ Fanon, p. 81.

²² Forster, p. 71.

²³ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁴ Morey, p. 261.

Taking off his spectacles, as was his habit before enunciating a general truth, he looked into them sadly, and remarked that the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa – not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm.²⁵

As well as providing further testament to the racial prejudices present in *A Passage to India*, McBryde's views on the truths of 'Oriental Pathology' appear to constitute the basis for many of the typically colonial assumptions Kunzru wishes to set aside. With Forrester and Amrita, Kunzru makes the point that also the fairer races are attracted to those darker, that the 'potentials they have forbidden themselves'²⁶ cannot be bound by the imperialist 'scientific' fact, and that cross racial attraction is almost an unavoidable human trait. Nevertheless, in contradicting McBryde, Kunzru may well be contending a significant strain of imperialist thought, though strikingly, he simultaneously does a great deal to confirm something of that already indicated by Forster in the form of telltale sexual mysticism.

According to David Rubin, Adela is in truth attracted to Aziz, but 'cannot admit that an Indian attracts her so much more than her English fiancé.'²⁷ When she enters the cave, her crisis is not spiritual in the way experienced earlier by Mrs. Moore, but rather sexual in the sense that she is unable to cope with the realization that she has found attraction on the other side of the racial divide. This theme of cross cultural attraction is elaborated upon even further when Adela at the very beginning of the trial notices the Indian in charge of pulling the courtroom punkah:

Almost naked, and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway, and he caught her attention as she came in, and he seemed to control the proceedings. He had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection that she accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god – not many, but one here and there, to prove to society how little its categories impress her. This man would have been notable anywhere; among the thin-hammed, flat-chested mediocrities of Chandrapore he stood out as divine, yet he was of the city, its garbage had nourished him, he would end on its rubbish-heaps. Pulling the rope towards him, relaxing it rhythmically, sending swirls of air over others, receiving none himself, he seemed apart from human destinies, a male Fate, a winnower of souls.²⁸

The cave scene of *The Impressionist* may well be quite different to what is actually narrated in *A Passage to India*, yet Adela's fascination with the punkah-wallah is strikingly similar to the effect Amrita has on Forrester in the cave. As if mesmerised by the lowly servant, Miss

²⁵ Forster, p. 206.

²⁶ Fanon, p. 78.

²⁷ David Rubin, *After the Raj: British Novels of India Since 1947* (Hanover PA: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 64.

²⁸ Forster, p. 205.

Quested seems to be irresistibly drawn to the punkah-wallah despite the apparent indecency of such a thought alone. Many of these characteristics are again detectable in Kunzru's Amrita as this character appears to capture much the same sense of mysticism as Forster's punkah-wallah, though with the obvious difference that the servant is male while Amrita of course is not. Just as Adela is drawn to the punkah-puller in the court room, Forrester is drawn to the young Indian girl in the cave, but once again, the suggestiveness in Forster becomes explicit action in Kunzru. In her essay 'Liberal Imperialism as *A Passage to India*' Theresa Hubel points out that 'almost every novel and a number of poems written about India by Englishmen [...] contain some vision of India or of the East as a magnetically attractive female figure'.²⁹ Clearly, Amrita is just this as she to Forrester is not only dangerously seductive, but also stands as a part of India for which he has been in search of without quite knowing. Not only is this character a clever reinvention of the punkah-puller, but also an elaboration upon some aspects familiar of Adela Quested: Once in the cave she realises that her main motive for travelling to the colonies was not marriage, but rather the notion of a long term liaison with India itself. Though horrific in the moment it occurred, the incident in the cave still brings with it a form of revelation as her repressed desire for a more intimate relation with the subcontinent, in whatever form, is fulfilled. In seducing Forrester, Amrita is similarly doing 'something she has only imagined', (p. 15) providing her with a moment of revelation outside of the colonial divides, but also, much as Miss Quested, fulfilling a fantasy in a brief moment of insight. Where Forster only allows for it to be carried out by ways of allusion, subtle forebodings, and symbolic suggestiveness, Kunzru builds on this oppositionally in the sense that Amrita with little reserve is permitted to completely fulfil much the same sexual fantasy. Not only is the attraction between English and Indian of *A Passage to India* present in *The Impressionist*, but Kunzru takes on yet another differing stance by allowing it to take its course with Amrita fulfilling the tendencies which in earnest were present already with Miss Quested.

Therefore, as Amrita, 'the native mother goddess', stands before Forrester 'smeared with mud', (p. 13) the Englishman is faced with a creature resembling mother India herself as well as a female reincarnation of Forster's punkah-wallah crossed, in a sense, with an Indian Adela Quested. Forrester takes Amrita to be 'some kind of phenomenon', (p. 14) 'a sort of shadow'³⁰ or even an echo such as the one responsible for Adela's fright in the lower cave.

²⁹ Theresa Hubel, 'Liberal Imperialism as *A Passage to India*', in *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*, ed. by Peter Childs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 351-62 (p. 357).

³⁰ Forster, p. 183.

Yet this 'shadow' has an earthly presence as her skin appears to be real, and by touching it Forrester is assured that she is not entirely a product of his imagination. Sharing much with the experiences Pran Nath will later suffer in the dubious care of Ma-ji and Balraj as well as recalling those of Miss Quested, Forrester too is filled with a sense that the world is 'suddenly hectic' as unfamiliar hands take charge of the buttons of his shirt and tug him to the cold floor. The cave has gotten hold and will not release him, and for both of Kunzru's characters, it is 'a lot to take in at once'. (p. 61) Pran is locked in a room. Forrester is in the clutches of an Indian cave. With Kunzru again subscribing to Forster's inherent ambiguity, Pran enters a state in which 'he is not sure of anything', (p. 61) and Forrester does much the same as Amrita takes charge of him. Being on dry land, the lone Englishman realises that he has survived the flood, and he knows he is in the presence of something, an indeterminate presence; a being of sorts, yet one that he is not entirely sure is human. Standing before him, Amrita has become the 'mother of the world', (p. 15) 'the material body'³¹ - the very earth itself. Mediating between the temporary light of the fire and eternal darkness of the cave with the help of flints and tinder, she is completely baffling to Forrester's ill adjusted western mind. Woman and cave have become one and the same, yet as the final unification takes place, also Forrester is immersed in this one all absorbent entity as sweat and dust gives their contrasting skin an 'identical red-brown' (p. 15) hue. For a short while Amrita and Forrester become one single entity, as momentarily beyond place, nationality and race, Kunzru's characters emerge as the combined symbol of East and West, of India and England. Amrita and Forrester have become the 'colour of the earth'. (p. 15) The binaries of colonizer and colonized are for a short while dissolved. Then the fire goes out as the two flames of Forster's Marabar caves meet: 'The radiance increases, the flames touch another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves.'³² Adela Quested runs down the hills. Forrester reverts to his former senses.

That which Forster could not say - the taboos that were unspeakable to the colonialist mindset - have at this point been voiced by Kunzru, and as a result, the formerly unsurpassable boundaries of colonialism have in a stroke of opposition been undermined. Standing up to the world, Amrita has not only interrupted the colonial 'chain of command',³³ but also made real the fears of the white man with the dreaded scenario of the Chandrapore English become reality. Yet the tables have turned also in the sense that the aggressor is no

³¹ Stone, p. 314.

³² Forster, p. 117.

³³ Fanon, p. 78.

longer male but female; the top of the imperial hierarchy has been defeated by the bottom; black has taken control of white, and woman has been proven stronger than man: Amrita has created Forrester and 'he has not, never will have, any other purpose than the one she gives him.' (p. 14) The 'subaltern as female' that could formerly not be 'heard or read',³⁴ has with Kunzru's amendments been given a voice and taken on an unprecedented role: Amrita, the colonial subject as woman, is no longer subordinate but has become an aggressor herself as she rules her former master. The Empire has, to borrow something of Rushdie's famous punning, 'struck back', and as the 'things of the defunct world' (p. 14) are swept away in the floods - the building blocks of colonialism itself irradiated by the forces of water - Amrita emerges as the 'mother of the new', the figurehead of a changed world. Within a cave, Kunzru has reconstructed the governing forces of colonized India, placing former subordinates temporarily in the place of ruler, and again *The Impressionist* elaborates upon themes already present in *A Passage to India*: In the Marabar cave, Miss Quested is only momentarily confronted with an India she cannot fathom, yet allegorically she represents a colonizer who is defeated by the colonized land of which she symbolically is supposed to be master. With Kunzru, the same occurs as Forrester is drawn into the cave by Amrita. To an even greater extent than Miss Quested, Forrester appears a fitting representative of the Imperial project, and unlike Adela who is only a member of the ruling race, Forrester is the very personification of the imperial ruler. Forrester the forester is man conquering the world, yet his defeat is even greater than that of Miss Quested as he not only is defeated by the contents of a cave, but also by a flood caused by the colonized land itself.

The strict divisions are left at the mouth of the Kunzru's cave, and as the English man is drawn inside by the Indian girl, the stereotypical roles of colonizer and colonized have been entirely reversed. With western domination giving way to oriental coercion, Forrester entirely forgets his assigned duties as well as the recommendations of 'India Office ordinances', (p. 15) and when finally reduced to a primeval, almost animal state, he is entirely removed from the great cause of which he is part. Surpassing all that should have kept them from each other, Amrita and Forrester have, for a short while, banished the British Empire to the world outside the cave, yet its powers are soon to return. Just as for Dr. Aziz who briefly finds companionship with a stray subaltern in a friendly game of polo, nationality once again begins to 'exert its poison',³⁵ and in the fashion of Miss Quested, Forrester makes a rash exit from

³⁴ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 28-37 (p. 35).

³⁵ Forster, p. 52.

the cave. In a humorous turn of mockery, the man of trees is carried away by ‘a young deodar’, (p. 16) but before he is resigned to a watery grave, he has a realization: The gap he was searching to fill may no longer be void, but something important has been altered in the process - a life changing occurrence has taken place and its further implications are too much to fathom. Within a cave, Kunzru appears to imply, the system of empire has not only been shaken, but entirely defeated by the land it set out to rule.

In little more than a dozen pages, Kunzru’s mimicry of Forster is seemingly completed. The liaison of Adela and Aziz, in the form of Amrita and Forrester, is laid to rest, and with the subsequent sections of the novel being placed some fifteen years later in time, the sequence of events that led to the conception of Pran Nath Razdan are for the most part resigned to the past. Pran Nath grows up, aspires to Englishness, and makes it to England before returning to Africa as part of an anthropological expedition, yet strikingly, the events that cause him to abandon his hard earned Englishness and revert to a de-westernized state mirror the events of his conception. For in Africa, Kunzru again has change take place in a cave. Uniting the early use of *A Passage to India* established with the beginning of *The Impressionist* with an additional redevelopment of Forster’s cave, the very final steps of Kunzru’s protagonist’s rise from mixed race outcast via Oxford student to African desert nomad, also culminates within the stone walls of an underground space. It may no longer be set in India and it may no longer build on the sexual connotation of Forster’s original, still Kunzru’s African edition of Forster’s cave is nonetheless inextricably linked to its earlier counterpart in *The Impressionist* as well as that in *A Passage to India*, as much of Forster’s extended symbolism remains prominent alongside what are otherwise Kunzru’s parody-like reinventions.

As the Chapel expedition makes its way to the place that is believed to be the Fotse³⁶ homestead, the ground gradually rises and ‘breaks up into a litter of boulders’. As ‘sheer cliffs push up on either side’ (p. 447) it becomes increasingly clear that Kunzru with intention is conjuring forth images of the Kawa Dol, the great rock that resides over Forster’s Marabar. When they arrive at the abandoned huts, the humble constructions are noticeably built ‘under the shadow of a huge rock’, (p. 477) and as Kunzru has the anthropologists make camp, fight

³⁶As Mars-Jones points to in his review of *The Impressionist*, also the name of Kunzru’s African tribe proves illustrative of the sly humour that Kunzru has frequently drawn upon with his novel. With a name that highly resembles ‘footsie’, the common abbreviation of the FTSE 100 share index, the identical when pronounced ‘Fotse’ is therefore not only a revised edition of Kurtz’s loyal tribe in disguise, but also, as Mars-Jones remarks, ‘an elaborate spoof of the stock market’. For the betterment of his academic career, professor Chapel relies upon the Fotse as subject of anthropological study, but when it is discovered that they too have been corrupted by the presence of western colonizers, Kunzru, with tongue in cheek, concludes that the Professor was rounded on like a man who had provided a ‘dud tip on the stock market’. (p. 448)

over latrines, and collect whatever genuine Fotse artefacts there are still to be had, there is again detectable a looming prophesy of caves. Travelling alongside a dried up river, Forster's imagery is given further emphasis as Jonathan Bridgeman³⁷, the fully English incarnation of Kunzru's protagonist, does so in the company of a 'curtain of rock', (p. 470) and recalling the Fotse ceremony at the base of the cliff where Bridgeman and Gittens observe the proceedings of a particular dance ritual, the reader as well as Kunzru's protagonist becomes increasingly assured that a cave, albeit changed, is again to assume a central role in the narrative. Though the central symbol may be unaltered, the scene that is yet to come brings with it a different promise than the one that came before, as removed from India, this second cave is no longer a place of unity and reconciliation, but rather a site of division and redemption as the underground confines of the African mountain, Kunzru strives to make clear, is not as much a place of worship as it is a place of the dead; a tomb where the departed are brought and their souls preserved for eternity.

As Jonathan enters the 'body of the earth', with the warmth and brightness of the African day being replaced by a world where 'all is cold and flickering firelight on stone', (p. 472) something of this becomes detectable. While the link to *A Passage to India* is initially strengthened further, the prior significance of the cave also gradually comes to be amended: Fluctuating somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious, Jonathan is taken underground, passing through the corridor that connects the darkness of the inner world to the brightness of the outer, but which simultaneously also evokes the great hill of Forster's colonial India as the caves in Africa have not only taken something of the Marabar as their own, but also a great deal of Forster's World Mountain:

At the centre is that 'small, secret and dark' inner core – the ur-temple, the ultimate darkness – around which is clustered all the complexity of the daylight world of appearance. On the inside is the anonymous, humourless region of the 'subconscious'. [...] On the outside is the world of ego, of consciousness and history, life in its tragedy, comedy, absurdity, abundance, and mess.³⁸

While the symbolic reference to Forster's extended imagery may be apparent, concealed under the surface of this shared image of divide resides the core of Kunzru's final amendment

³⁷ Once again the choice of name is not insignificant as 'Bridgeman' most likely is derived from the 'Bridge party' held in the earlier sections of *A Passage to India*. Though not dedicated to the game of bridge itself, the event organized by the Collector was designed to better Anglo-Indian relations by 'bridging the gap' between the Indians and English of Chandrapore. Apart from providing an apparent link to Forster, the name of Kunzru's character appears highly appropriate in the sense that he by the time he assumes this name has fully managed to transform himself from Indian street urchin to English university student - a character who has bridged the gap between identities.

³⁸ Stone, p. 302.

to Forster. Though the mountain in Africa also divides the 'subconscious' from the conscious, the emphasis of *The Impressionist* remains with transformed images of Forster's 'complexity' and 'mess'. The 'absurdity' of the outside world is the presence of the white explorers in Fotseland, and the 'anonymous' tranquillity of the inner is the mark of an existence sheltered from colonialism as in allegorical terms, the way that leads into Kunzru's mountain separates not only good from evil and Fotse from European, but also the pre-colonial from the colonial. In *The Impressionist*, the cave is the single aspect of Africa that the evils of imperialism have not corrupted, and accordingly, it becomes the only appropriate venue of Bridgeman's return to a pre-western state.

Having been brought inside the cave by the Fotse, Jonathan is removed from all the aspects of himself which before would have identified him as the English born and Oxford educated Jonathan Bridgeman. He is stripped of his clothes. 'Fingers rub and pinch every part of his skin', (p. 472) and it is as if the fists of the rock itself - the same ones that assaulted Miss Quested - are undressing him, the red hands of the ancestors 'tugging unfamiliarly at his buttons'. (p. 472) Again the legacy of Forster makes itself known as Kunzru's cave comes to be described as a living thing, 'a great living rock' (p. 473) that does what it chooses to those who enter its confines. Regaining lucidity, Jonathan looks up and sees that 'the ceiling is like a dome' (p. 472) - the hollow half of the world sphere in which, as Forster put it, "'concentration' could take place".³⁹ Almost as if drawn to the centre of the cave ceiling are the handprints, forming a red dome quite of their own, and with hands and stone, Fotse and cave become one and the same, colony and cave are united in a common entity. The Fotse, much like Amrita, become the land itself. Where the boulders of the Kawa Dol converse with the small stones saying 'I am alive',⁴⁰ Bridgeman can hear the chanting voices of the Fotse worshipping their pagan gods, and condemning the evil white sorcerers of the world outside. Again Kunzru's protagonist has reached the centre of the world, but this time it is not just the core of a mountain, but it is the space at the very heart of the Fotse universe where all things dead and alive meet and converge in a primeval darkness.

To the Fotse, the English of the Chapel expedition are all evil beings come to disrupt the perpetual motion of time that is central to the Fotse way of life, but while Jonathan may have appeared deceptively similar to the others, the Fotse can see that he is a repossessed body taken over by a European spirit and not, like the other white men, an incarnation of evil. Very much a sly commentary upon the misdoings of empire, Kunzru's elaborate tribe are

³⁹ Ibid., p. 301.

⁴⁰ Forster, p. 141.

concerned that the old times are lost and that the new that have come with the advent of the colonial presence in Fotseland are a change for the worse. To the Fotse, time is no longer present the way it was, as with the recent arrival of the European spirits that have begun to populate the riverbank, it has come to be divided into a new and an old – the time before and after the white man came up the jungle river. In common with any colonized people, the existence of the Fotse has been subjected to a great deal of upheaval as the result of the colonization of their land, yet symptomatic of Kunzru's postcolonial agenda, they are not prepared to surrender their old ways without a fight. A decision is made to eradicate the colonizers, the 'upside-down' people of the outside world, 'once and for all', (p. 457) and with the altar of the cave humorously doubling as a 'campaign map' and the cave itself as a 'secret command centre', (p. 474) the space under the earth also becomes the centre of anti colonial campaign. With Kunzru no longer building on Forster's colonial scepticism but seemingly relying on postcolonial opposition alone, the Fotse launch a war against imperialism itself; an effort whose main objective is to rid Fotseland Africa of the unwanted European presence, and with the immanent exorcism of his European spirit, Bridgeman accordingly emerges as the very symbol of the Fotse anti-imperialist campaign as well as of colonized Africa itself. A blend of old and new, colonizer and colonized, Kunzru's protagonist is torn between two extremities much as the Fotseland he is meant to be exploring, and as preparations are underway for the extraction of the evil spirit that has taken hold of him, the same is true of the lands themselves. In anticipation of a return of an untouched, primeval Africa, Kunzru again fulfils the inherent fear of the white explorer as the Chapel expedition is slaughtered and the traces of its presence removed, yet most importantly, Jonathan is saved. The Fotse can see that he is not like the others, though he appears as white, deep down he is black, and accordingly Bridgeman bears the mark of an ally worthy of redemption rather than that of an enemy.

As the Fotse perform their acts of exorcism inside the cave, Jonathan enters a state of semi conscious dreamtime in which he momentarily leaves his body and his mind drifts to find a place among the dome of hands in the cave ceiling. Ascribing again to the image of Forster's World Mountain, Bridgeman, it would appear, has entered its inner cell; the space at the mountain's very core where the unconscious resides, but whose surface is 'the world of mind and will', and its peak 'the world of abstracting ideality' – the 'point of release.'⁴¹ As the European spirit gradually loosens its grip on Jonathan, his spirit travels through the layers

⁴¹ Wilfred Stone, 'The Caves of *A Passage to India*', in *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. by John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 16-26 (p. 21).

of the mountain, striving to reach its highest point where hopefully it can be freed from the forces that have taken hold:

He rises up towards the ceiling, while his body rolls in the dust, arching its spine, gnashing its uninhibited teeth in unfelt pain, because his spirit is racing out of the uterine darkness of this cave [...] over the land, far away, the scrub shooting beneath it like stars. (p. 473)

Yet the evil spirit is relentless, and is not prepared to let go without a battle. Jonathan's mind and body are momentarily drawn back together, and the Fotse soldier on in their battle with the dormant spirit. One of the elders gives Jonathan a 'thick, bitter drink', (p. 476) and before long the same sensation again returns:

Though he remains in the cave, lying down in the centre of the white chalk figure the old man has drawn on the floor, he also travels up, out of the mouth of the cave, and down the hill towards the white men's camp. The land skims beneath him as he rushes over it, white as bone in the moonlight. (p. 476)

Once again good is defeated by evil, and the peak of the cave mountain is therefore not reached, yet this time Jonathan remains in the realm of mind and will as the Fotse proceed to mark his body with metal brands. At the first touch of hot metal on pristine skin, Jonathan's spirit takes leave of his body for a third time, and finally, 'he can feel the spirit begin to loosen its grip'. (p. 477) Recalling the experiences of Amrita, colonizer has again been defeated by colonized, yet on a greater scale than before as the European spirit has been removed from Kunzru's protagonist as well as Fotseland itself. The sorcerers are dead, the Englishman named Jonathan Bridgeman is a thing of the past, and all is again quiet in the caves of the dead.

As the novel draws to a close, the impressionist has returned to the place he was created, to the womb of the universe in which his life was formed twenty three-years before, but also to 'one of the universal archetypes'⁴² present in Forster's cave imagery. From this cavity old life is transformed into new, but 'everything so born is also called back',⁴³ and accordingly there is a reason why *The Impressionist* ends much where it begins as all that comes to be in a cave must, also in Kunzru's case, return for its demise. Pran is conceived in a cave, and having taken on the form of Bridgeman, he is returned to one at the novel's end, yet proving somewhat of an anomaly, he does not die. Rather than marking the point of human death, the African cave marks the end of the colonial presence in Fotseland as well as the

⁴² Ibid., p. 308.

⁴³ Ibid.

removal of the European influences within Kunzru's protagonist. With the preservation of all that does not represent empire and the destruction of all that does, Kunzru's pattern of cave opposition once again begins to emerge, for the cave is no longer Forster's 'womb of origination and death',⁴⁴ but in Kunzru's Africa it rather becomes the premier force of the anti-colonial: The Fotse coordinate their attack from within a cave, Bridgeman is removed from all that is colonial inside a cave, and of course, Forrester, the symbol of the British Empire, also dies by the doings of a cave. Though potentially a place of unity, the Marabar of Forster's India have with Kunzru become a place of conflict and opposition; a site that is always beyond the reach of imperialism and at all times stands in opposition to the colonized lands outside of its confines. By the end of *The Impressionist* a symbolic duality representative of the postcolonial is established as based in the final events of the novel, the exorcised Impressionist becomes the personification of the postcolonial self, while Fotseland comes to be representative of postcolonial Africa, India, as well as potentially any other land that has been subjected to colonial rule. The simultaneous extraction of Jonathan's European spirit in the cave alongside the death of the Fotseland expedition is not only the end of Kunzru's anglicized protagonist, but also of a colonized Fotseland. As Chapel, Gittens, Marchant, and the others are hunted down by the Fotse and Bridgeman's evil spirit is in the throes of being expelled, Fotseland is about to enter the postcolonial era - a new age in which the native lands are again ruled by the natives themselves, and where time, as the Fotse would put it, is again continuous.

The final pages of *The Impressionist*, however, are not unanimous in the prediction of a bright future for Fotseland as though the 'European spirits have been banished to the outer lands', the 'wound in time' (p. 479) is still to heal properly. Fotseland, even in the absence of the foreign presence, is not entirely what it used to be as disconcertingly, 'there are still the old times and the new'. (p. 479) The legacy of imperialism, it seems, has made its mark on the Fotse way of life as after the upside-down people have left it is no longer the way it was before, and though the anthropologist may have been eradicated and the evils of sorcery removed, the battle of the Fotse may not yet have reached completion. For the time being, 'the rains come and the desert blooms', (p. 479) but at the landing that has now grown to a township, another invasion is taking form. A steamer 'packed with infantry' (p. 480) makes its way up the river. Artillery is being moved along the newly built road. For now the Fotse have won the fight and the sorcerers have lost, but victory is not yet theirs as the final battle

⁴⁴ Ibid.

with colonialism, Kunzru appears to be suggesting, has still to come. The Fotse, it would seem, may again have to flee to the hills and take refuge in the safe protective chambers of Forster's reinvented a cave.

II. KIPLING:

CHILD OF MANY FACES

It is possible, even before the first sentence of *The Impressionist* has come before the keen eye of the reader, to detect evidence of a textual legacy that links the novel to Rudyard Kipling. Taken from the fifth chapter of *Kim*, Kunzru's epigraph of choice clearly goes a way to confirm the almost inevitable suspicions of literary ancestry that most likely will come to follow, but above this, it points to the very aspect that is predominant in both works and also, it would seem, much the cause of such suspicions: 'Remember, I can change swiftly. It will all be as it was when I first spoke to thee under Zam-Zammah the great gun –' 'As a boy in the dress of white men – when I first went to the Wonder House. And a second time thou wast a Hindu. What shall the third incarnation be?''¹ Not only does Kim call upon the lama to remember their first meeting outside the Lahore Museum, but also to recall his trademark ability which enables him to shift from one appearance to another. Kunzru's choice of epigraph, consequently, is in no way a coincidence as it performs the task of evoking Kipling even before the first page has been turned, but also that of bringing attention to the trait particular to Kipling's protagonist that Kunzru most importantly wishes to put to a new and alternate use. Remembering, of course, the oftentimes sensational feats of deception orchestrated and carried out by the young Kimball O'Hara, the deliberate choice of Kunzru to include a main character who eventually comes to display many of the same characteristics as Kipling's protagonist accordingly serves to underline not only Kunzru's repeated wish to engage with the colonial canon, but goes a long way to indicate which particular end he intends *Kim* to serve when subjected to his project of postcolonial opposition.

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 139.

While the re-emergence of Forster's cave may in earnest have served to explore some of the more controversial legacies of colonialism and empire, the lightly concealed immersion of Kipling's highly regarded quest tale in Kunzru's novel appears to provide well for the inherent criticism of racial classifications already familiar to Kunzru's postcolonial reworkings. Much in the same manner in which Kunzru's games with Forster have made for an oppositional commentary on race and the sexual myths affiliated with empire, Kipling has for Kunzru laid open the possibility to critique another aspect; namely that of identity and empire. By recalling Kipling's colonial picaresque Kunzru may well have discovered the basis for many of the oftentimes fantastical characters, incidents, and settings which dominate the greater part of his novel, but more importantly, by looking to *Kim* and Kipling's subtle commentary on colonial relations, Kunzru appears to have come across a somewhat cunning, yet at the same time effective method of exposing the maze of cruel and oppressive foundations which at most times have underlain the system of empire. Writing, as he is, not only in opposition to Kipling, but also to the system of imperialist rule that provided for him, *Kim*, as it is present in *The Impressionist*, provides almost the ideal basis for Kunzru's extensive criticism of the British Empire.

Kipling's contribution to the tradition of colonial storytelling was, apart from introducing a blend of the picaresque and bildungsroman, a protagonist who is able to navigate the oftentimes troubled racial divides of British ruled India. As Edward Said remarks already in his introduction to *Kim*, a particularly fascinating aspect is precisely this 'remarkable gift for disguise' as almost nothing appears beyond this character as he passes 'from one dialect' and 'from one set of values and beliefs to the other'.² Based largely within the recollections of his Bombay childhood, Kipling portrays a world in which the line between black and white - coloniser and colonized - becomes blurred, and hybridity as well as mimicry are the order of the day. As Zohreh T. Sullivan points to in *Narratives of Empire: The fictions of Rudyard Kipling*, the only way of surviving in India for a character such as Kipling's is quite clearly by being 'constantly on guard, learned in Indian ways' as well as 'a master of Indian disguise'.³ Consider, for instance, the opening scene of Kipling's novel which Kunzru recalls with his epigraph: Stumbling across Kim, the 'Little Friend of all the World', on the doorsteps of the famous museum, the aged Tibetan is faced with a scene of a young boy posing as black and white at the same time without, quite remarkably, one

² Ibid., p. 42.

³ Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 88.

appearance standing in the way of the other. Kim is not a boy of a single appearance of identity, but rather a young man whose identity is comprised of a great many amongst which he chooses almost at will. Accordingly, then, Kunzru's epigraph is chosen with good reason as it appears to encapsulate this very quality of Kipling's character which Kunzru is so eager to redevelop. For sitting astride the Great Gun, Kim is described as being is 'burned black as any native', consorting 'on terms of perfect equality with the boys of the bazar',⁴ though nonetheless bearing striking resemblance to a white boy misplaced among a crowd of Indians – the very image of a cross cultural hybrid well versed in the art moving swiftly from one diverse identity to another.

The use of a main character highly capable of adapting to varied environments was by no means a newfound trait of Kipling's writings by the time the first instalment of *Kim* saw publication in *McClure's Magazine* in December 1900.⁵ Already some years before, with the many short stories collected in *The Jungle Book*, the use of characters that were able to adapt well to a wide range of largely colonial settings was established. In his discussion of Kim's hybridity in an ethnological context, Don Randall argues that 'just as the wolfish Mowgli is not yet human, so Kim, the boy of the bazaar, is not yet European.'⁶ Although Mowgli, the boy famously known to have been raised by wolves, was capable of communicating with the animals of the Indian Jungle, many of the same qualities lived on in Kim, even though they, of course, were put to somewhat different use. Leaning on the precedent set by earlier bildungsroman novels such as Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Kipling follows Kim on a journey of self development, allowing him to pass from well born street urchin to an initiated contender in the struggle over central Asian supremacy with the Russian Empire. Including many quintessentially picaresque traits in many ways reminiscent of Thomas Nash's late sixteenth century novel *The Unfortunate Traveler*, Kipling's narrative is marked by an episodic plot structure which in due course sees Kim flee from one adventure to another, and leads him on his somewhat unlikely way from lowly outcast to acclaimed British spy. It is this, the steady flow of incident, the quickly changing settings, and the diverse character cast which gradually allows Kim the opportunity to demonstrate his chameleon-like qualities, and accordingly this particular aspect of Kipling's novel, combined with the characteristically divided self of the protagonist, that constitutes by far the strongest link

⁴ Kipling, p. 49.

⁵ Norman Page, *A Kipling Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 152.

⁶ Don Randall, 'Ethnography and the Hybrid Boy in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*', *Ariel*, 27 (1996), 79-104 (p. 88).

between Kunzru's project of exploring postcolonial identity and Kipling's earlier colonial fantasy.

As the initial instalments of both Kunzru's and Kipling's tales unfold, it is therefore with little surprise one can note that the former proves reminiscent of the latter in more than one way. With the death of Pandit Razdan, Pran, like Kim, also becomes an orphan. Following Pran's eviction from the household of which he had been part for some fifteen years, Kunzru's protagonist also comes to endure the life of a street urchin. They are both young boys. They both possess the quality of being able to look Indian and English at the same time. Kunzru, it seems, is doing his best to conjure forth a twin image of Kipling's protagonist. However, immediate likenesses soon turn to differences upon closer scrutiny as although they both find themselves living from hand to mouth amongst the thriving bazaar stalls, and both embody features of ruler as well as ruled, Kim, unlike Pran, is no stranger to such a way of life. In fact, Kimball O'Hara, the fully Irish son of a Maverick colour-sergeant, had, apart from his years in the Masonic Orphanage, known little other than the life of a street urchin supposedly under the care of a half-caste woman. By the time Kipling's protagonist enters his mid teens some time after the Second Afghan War drew to a close in 1880,⁷ he is master of the Lahore byways, having learned much as a child from the night-time commissions he executed for 'sleek and shiny young men of fashion'.⁸

Much unlike Kim, however, Pran has clearly still to learn these very skills and adapt to his newfound status as cultural hybrid. At the time of his eviction he is in no way equipped to deal with life outside the safety of the family home, and, more importantly, neither is he in any way reconciled with the fact that he is not the pure blooded Indian he had been led to believe he was during his childhood years:

He tries not to think about what has happened to him. His father is dead. And he was not his father, anyway. His father was the Englishman in the photograph, and he is dead too. Does this make him an Englishman? He does not feel like an Englishman. He is an Indian, a Kashmiri Pandit. He knows what he is. He feels it. (p. 52)

Kunzru's protagonist is the product of a liaison which to Indian and English alike spells nothing other than shame and resentment. With this finally becoming evident to Pran himself as well as to his surroundings, the Agra streets he had come to know so intimately in child-

⁷ Francis Watson, *A Concise History of India* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), p. 148. On one occasion Mahbub Ali presents Kim by means of referring to his father who was 'once a white soldier in the big war', placing the events of *Kim* some years later.

⁸ Kipling, p. 51.

play are at once transformed into a largely hostile place as both sides of the racial divide are equally eager to disown him. To either, it seems, he does in highly undesirable fashion encapsulate something of the other with which they do not wish to be associated. As Pran's self-denial gradually passes and comes to be replaced by well founded fears for what is to become of him in the hours as well as days that lay ahead, Kunzru has already succeeded in attributing a highly amended significance to Kipling's hybrid bazaar boy. Kim, after all, is largely a source of intrigue and curiosity as he navigates the crowded streets of nineteenth century India, while Pran in contrast emerges much as a figure of detestation as he accompanies the beggar for his first night in the Agra dust. He may still join Kim in being a subtle mix of India and England, yet symbolically he is quite the opposite as unlike Kipling's teenage hero who is portrayed almost as a prized possession of empire itself, Kunzru's is in no way a credit to the same enterprise. Quite clearly, any Englishman or Indian who would come to set eyes on him long enough to spot his English features would also recognize him as nothing other than the seemingly undesirable by-product of colonialism Kunzru has made him out to be. As Pran loiters and begs outside the house which used to be his home with 'crusted clothes' (p. 42) reeking of dried excrement, Kunzru has replaced Kipling's colonial romanticism with some of the harsh realities of the very same unforgiving world. Though both characters share the similar, unmistakably colonial backdrop, their places in it as a result of the same phenomenon are, it would appear, markedly different.

Clearly, Kim is very much in control of his own existence already in the opening scene of the novel as he, we are told by Kipling, has just 'kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions' of the Zam-Zammah. In Kipling's renderings of what to most purposes must be considered the idealised India of his own adolescence, this was an act well justified for despite his deceptively Indian appearance, Kim is still considered a member of the ruling race. Because the 'English held the Punjab and Kim was English', (p. 49) Kim is, certainly according to Kipling, quite within his rights to remove the Indian boy from the prime position astride the great gun. To most purposes, the character depicted by Kipling could do as he pleased. The boundaries of appearance and race do seemingly not apply as he is as happy to successfully play the part of Indian boy as well as English teenager. The boy who is described comfortably observing the comings and goings of bazaar life is by virtue of his Irish parentage an emblem of colonialism as well as a symbol of an anglicized India under British rule, or as Sullivan puts it - 'a new breed of English ruler born and bred in the land [...] more successful

than the old.’⁹ It is precisely descriptions such as this which render a further selection of clues to Kunzru’s oppositional use of Kipling, for markedly colonialist, the pages of *Kim* bring with them an inherent sense of imperialist superiority, and it is this, the many underlying assumptions of empire which repeatedly come to the surface of Kipling’s text, that Kunzru in due course strives to undermine with the remarkably similar yet decidedly different Pran Nath.

When Pran, for instance, is brought face to face with Harry Begg, a fellow half-breed who is doing his very best to be as English as he can, Kunzru’s program of opposition is beginning to make itself known, as gone are the trouble-free transitions of appearance so familiar to Kipling’s adolescent hero, and in their place is instead a well armed commentary upon the arbitrary yet crucial classifications of race that have proven to serve Kim so well: Begg comes across Kunzru’s shabby looking protagonist in the street on his way to an evening during which, it is made clear, the very last thing he needs is to be reminded of is his own mixed heritage. To Pran, however, the subtle traces of alien features in an otherwise English face are precisely the reason he approaches Begg and thinks he has found someone who will help him in his hour of need: ‘I am blackie-white like you’, he says, ‘I am hungry. Do you have some food?’ (p. 48) Had it been Kim who stood before Harry Begg this particular evening, the outcome of this encounter may have been somewhat different and something of the evening out may still have been salvageable. To Begg, an English boy such as Kipling’s hero posing as an Indian would not invoke the same rage as the sight of Kunzru’s Pran who to him represents all that was wrong with colonialism and, of course, the thing that he has been trying to expel from his own being and that up until then had thwarted his otherwise hopeful prospects. Only a little darker than ‘the colour of a manila envelope’ (p. 49) himself, the sight of Pran and immediate recognition of the hated features causes him to remember the taint he has fought all his life, and, in a fit of fury, he beats Pran with the badminton racket he is carrying with him.

In a typically humorous yet poignant twist of events, the matter of skin-colour which to Kipling appears little other than a practical consideration, has with Kunzru become something of a cruel joke. In Kipling’s Lahore, Kim’s affiliation with either side of the racial divide is never questioned, as to Kim, occupying the role of English or Indian is largely a matter of choice, and his surroundings largely accept it as being so. With *The Impressionist*, however, this very question becomes a returning matter of uncertainty as the themes of

⁹ Sullivan, p. 158.

personal identity, race, and appearance are elaborated upon and, more importantly, questioned at almost every conceivable crossroad. Indeed, the minor incident with Harry Begg proves to be a timely reminder of the particular social stigma often associated with the mixings of English and Indian in colonial India, but most significantly, it is an effective method which Kunzru utilises to underline the evident differences between his own and Kipling's eminent protagonist. While Kim in respectable fashion is the orientalisised son of an Irish sergeant, Kunzru's reincarnation of the very same character is loathed by both sides of the divide alike. Almost with tongue in cheek, Kunzru's allows the skin which was formerly proof of Pran's rightful claim to an ancient Himalayan bloodline and which marked him as 'a perfect Kashmiri' (p. 20) to become a source of grave misfortune almost at the proverbial flick of a switch. Much in keeping with what is to become the mantra of Kunzru's colonial world of postcolonial reason, whiteness is no longer the mark of all that is pure and untainted, but has rather become the hallmark of the evils of foreign mastery. With Kipling the ability to pass as black and white was a prized asset, though in the case of Pran Nath it has become the very opposite; a badge of tainted heritage that displays the unworthiness of its bearer.

Conceivably, the time Pran comes to spend in the care of Ma-ji and Balraj the wrestler is little other than a further instalment in what has already become a tale of misery, yet to Kunzru it appears to constitute a further commentary upon the forming of changing identities. Despite the initially hopeful prospects of a roof over his head, a steady flow of meals, and a 'courtyard full of women', (p. 56) there is little reason to rejoice as his newfound existence proves to be something quite different to the salvation he had hoped it to be. Still, in terms of his self development these events are significant as they mark his first real steps in a transition from one extravagant incarnation to another as well as, somewhat strangely, Kunzru's return to the model laid out for him by Kipling. Just as Kim who becomes the lama's new chela and puts his talents to use in aid of the old man's search for 'the River of the Arrow', Pran is forced to utilize aspects of himself which in the past had only been employed in cruel jokes and cunning games within the walls of the Razdan household. When Kim meets the lama, his former existence largely devoted to play like pastimes is put to new use in his newfound role as protector as well as guide, and just as Pran whose life comes to rely on the lessons learned in adolescent play, Kim's knowledge of the Lahore streets becomes an important tool in the search for the elusive river. In short, the first building-blocks of self construction have in the case of both characters been laid down, but while the hero of Kipling's tale becomes a chela, the hero of Kunzru's tale does, with the intervention of

selected magic realist flourishes, quite humorously find himself dressed up as an androgynous boy girl in a silky costume.

Much as was the case with the appropriation of Forster, also the text of Kipling proves to have been exposed to a recurring pattern of playful alterations and amendments serving to undermine as well as ridicule selected aspects of the text which went before. As a whole, the somewhat fantastical transformation of Pran that sees him reinvented as new incarnation by the name of Rukhsana marks the first of many stark deviations from the text's colonial model. Almost certainly a subject that would have been unthinkable to Kipling, Kunzru knowingly diverts the reader with an elaborate tale of 'special lassi', (p. 61) semi-real hallucinations and sexual misconduct before somewhat surprisingly approaching Kipling's colonial boy once again: For intoxicated and suffering from a spell of desperation Pran decides that escape is the only way forward, and pulling the sheets off the bed in an attempt to make a rope to climb down into the street, the cloth itself suddenly proves to be of immense interest. It is as if there within the actual material is a universe of significance which even his drugged brain can fathom: 'The pattern. It is like a forest. Or a troupe of dancing girls. Or parrots, each one trained to speak a different way. In a sense all parrots talk the same. Although differently. How exactly do the parrots talk? Have that, and you have everything'. (p. 61) Kunzru may be mocking Kipling, yet at the same time he is ascribing to one of Kim's premier talents – the aptitude for mimicry and behavioural appropriation. Pran has found the key to survival, but simultaneously he has also stumbled upon one of Kim's most significant traits. Though by a conflicting route, Kunzru is gradually shaping his own protagonist in the mould of Kipling's as Pran, who had not learned the value of borrowing 'right- and left-handedly from the country he knew and loved'¹⁰ at an early age, is still to learn even the first lessons of this essential survival technique.

Mimicry, although conveniently reduced by Murat Aydemir in his study of *The Impressionist* to merely a 'concept of conceiving identity',¹¹ is a term central to Kunzru and Kipling alike because it is descriptive of one of the premier traits on which both their protagonists depend heavily. Just as with Kim who, should the need arise, could source a 'complete suit of Hindu Kit' hidden in 'a secret place under some baulks in Nila Ram's timber-yard'¹² and was 'hand in glove with men who lead lives stranger than anything Haroun

¹⁰ Kipling, p. 121.

¹¹ Murat Aydemir, 'Impressions of Character: Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist*', in Inge E. Boer, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis*, ed. by Mieke Bal and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 199-217 (p. 204).

¹² Kipling, p. 51.

al Raschid dreamed of',¹³ Kunzru allows the talents of his own protagonist who formerly found employment 'in cruel parodies of the chowkidar's limp, or the way the dirzi's hare-lipped son ate dal' (p. 28) to be utilised in an effort to amalgamate with and blend into his steadily changing environments. Described by Homi K. Bhabha as being 'the difference between being English and being Anglicized',¹⁴ the concept of mimicry therefore proves highly descriptive of the efforts displayed by both characters as although they may become increasingly proficient at mimicking and copying the people around them, neither ever becomes a true copy. Instead, it seems, they are transformed into passable replicas with outwards appearances that fool the majority of their surroundings.

Particularly within postcolonial studies, the notion of mimicry has emerged as an increasingly useful way of chartering the often multifarious variations in outward conformity of colonized peoples as the general nature of colonial mimicry can, according to Bhabha, be described as 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.¹⁵ Kim may behave like an Indian, speak like an Indian, and many times even look like an Indian, but he nonetheless remains the son of Irish parents – an orientalist European as much as Pran will always remain the son of an Indian mother and an English father however deceptive his appearance may come to be. Neither of the two may fully ascribe to either Englishness or Indianness, with Kim, it must be remembered, speaking his mother tongue in a 'clipped uncertain sing-song',¹⁶ and Pran always struggling to fully adapt to the many identities in question. Always, it seems, there is something that reveals their otherness and resultantly Kim remains, much as the evicted Pran, a partial outcast as the result of near perfect similarity rather than vast difference. In order to be effective, Bhabha argues, mimicry must endeavour to 'continually produce its slippages, its excess, its difference',¹⁷ and it is upon this particular aspect of mimicry so aptly described by Bhabha Kunzru repeatedly turns with this adaptation of Kipling in search of comical effect.

Commonplace to Kunzru's satirical musings are accordingly many instances in which particularly the earlier incarnations of the novel's protagonist time and time again fails to navigate the set patterns of behaviour, appearance, and speech of the individuals whose favour he hopes to win. While Kim, it must be remembered, in the first three days of his acquaintance with the Lama hardly experiences a single incident in which he is caught off

¹³ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 128.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁶ Kipling, p. 49.

¹⁷ Bhabha, p. 122.

guard by a given situation or does not know which course of action to follow, Kunzru's protagonist makes his way through his first few trials with very little idea of what might be the proper mode of conduct. Compared to the example of Kipling's seemingly infallible hero who persuades the Amritsar girl on the train to Benares to pair their fare, the Hindu farmer to provide lodgings at Umballa, and the old soldier to serve as guide, Pran struggles to provide himself with even a bare minimum of food. He has just been evicted, he is aware that he must begin to adapt to the surroundings he has unwillingly been placed in, but his first attempts are largely a failure. Kunzru, it seems, appears to differ from Kipling in that the reader is made privy to the process his main character must undergo in order to gain even the most basic knowledge of these crucial skills. To Kim, every new encounter is seemingly a chance to make another entry in the record of impressions kept in the corner of his mind as well as an opportunity to employ those already present in whichever form happens to appear the most appropriate, while to Pran they are at least in the first instance an almost insurmountable challenge pointing to Kunzru's wish not only invoke Kipling's character, but also provide commentary upon the talents he so effortlessly displays.

In the two colonial worlds described by both authors, mimicry appears the only hope the young boys have of making their way, and in the face of the differentness that seemingly will always mark them there seems little to do other than strive to perfect the art of assimilation - the hard earned ability of being able to fade into the background and of adding little pieces of others to themselves. However, as Kunzru's novel progresses, the familiar theme of outward conformity so prominent in *Kim* becomes a means for Kunzru not only to undermine the divisions between black and white as well as Indian and English, but, by route of his oftentimes parody-like approach, becomes a way of mocking the colonialist models of oriental learning. Rather than adapting a young European boy to India, Kunzru has constructed a character who is not only troubled by mixed affinities but also by mixed parentage; a character who strives to fulfil the objectives set out in Lord Macaulay's 1835 *Minute to Parliament* of becoming English in 'tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect',¹⁸ but eventually does so in colour and blood as well. Unlike in the case of *Kim*, where Kipling in earnest was attempting something of an experiment with a cross cultural main character, Kunzru has constructed a protagonist who first succeeds in becoming Bhabha's 'reformed, recognizable Other'¹⁹ before becoming almost its very model.

¹⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 140.

¹⁹ Bhabha, p. 122.

According to Jacques Lacan ‘mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind’, but unlike with Kipling there is with Kunzru’s character very little ‘self’ to recall. The void between the mimicked selves appears to be little other than a blankness, and while the ‘mimicked selves’ portrayed by Kunzru are largely exaggerated, there is in the transitional sections a clear feeling that there is nothing in place to be revealed. When Pran, renamed Rukhsana, is faced by the intimidating Khwaja-sara, chief hijra of the Fatehpur palace, Kunzru appears to be making the tentative suggestion that ‘what is behind’ mimicry can not only be disguised as is most prominently the case with Kim, but can also come to be lost altogether in a infinite whirl comprised of the many models that are available for reproduction by mimicry:

You may think you are singular. You may think you are incapable of change. But we are all as mutable as the air! Release yourself, release your body and you can be a myriad! An army! There are no names for it, Rukhsana. Names are just foolishness of language, which is a bigger foolishness than most. Why try to stop a river? Why try to freeze a cloud? (p. 82)

The towering figure tells the highly intimidated newcomer of the infinite choices of selves available to those who care to look, and although Pran Nath, for the occasion appropriately renamed the ‘motherless fatherless blankness’, (p. 92) is understandably preoccupied with his likely prospects of facing the future as an eunuch, Kunzru does in fact appear to be providing a sly commentary upon the formation of identities. While in *Kim* the reader is presented with a clearly defined character who, despite evident changes, is easily recognized at the novel’s end as the character he was at its beginning, *The Impressionist* much in contrast narrates into being a protagonist who is at the mercy of the events that take place to such an extent that the character himself almost becomes lost in a maze, as it were, of fleeting impressions. Rukhsana, the narrator of *The Impressionist* imparts, means nothing. According to the Khwaja-sara a name is a mere practicality that can be replaced by another almost at the will of fancy. The world is, to borrow something of Kipling’s metaphors, a great river of new nothings waiting to be possessed by an empty blankness, and as a new incarnation is about to assemble its form, fragments of other hijras, palace servants, naked girls on bicycles, or any other impressions that include a trait worth copying come to be included as a part of a new mimicked self that answers to the name of Rukhsana. For Kunzru’s character, it would appear, mimicry does not only provide a means of survival, but consequently also a way of constructing a self.

Very much a product of Kunzru's inherently postcolonial outlook, the struggles of identity experienced by his protagonist become emblematic of a postcolonial world itself in which identity, as Bhabha puts it, is drawn between the 'demand and desire'²⁰ caused by the divided sense of affiliation produced by the mixings of cultures. Though also Kipling's character on several occasions is drawn between the two sections of his English and Indian self, Kunzru's protagonist comes to be tellingly divided by his loyalty, not only to the ways of the English and the Indian, but also to all the conceivable hybrid identities between. What to Kipling's ostensibly colonial outlook were unproblematic and largely confined categorizations, would with Kunzru appear to have become a diverse range of split, yet at the same time fluctuating identities determined by a continuously varying combination of elements drawn from both cultures so prominently present in the India Kunzru describes.

As Kunzru's protagonist passes from Pran Nath to Rukhsana and in turn to Clive, the protégé of the somewhat circumspect Major Privett-Clampe²¹, it is therefore with some interest one can note that not only are the traits that link Kunzru to Kipling frequently related to the concept of mimicry, but much the same applies also to the characters that reappear in *The Impressionist*. Taking the shape of parodies of their former Kipling selves, the majority of which are related to the very same concept by means of their role in developing the mimicking talents of Kunzru's protagonist. When Pran is taken to the door of the British Residency this comes to be increasingly evident as Kunzru joins Kipling in allowing his protagonist to enter a second stage of self-fashioning - a sphere where 'intercultural' mimicry, the very thing that had allowed the boys to navigate the many intricacies of Indian life, is abandoned in favour of the 'cross cultural' under supervision of a mentor figure. For both characters, it would appear, mimicry has led to aspirations for whiteness, yet while Kim is first to discover the merits of his European parentage when found in the compound of the Maverick regiment, Kunzru's recreates something of the same experience for his own character as Pran is led into the office of the Major in Fatehpur:

'You've got some white blood in you,' he continues, gesturing at Pran with his tumbler. 'More than a little, by the look of you. With training you might understand. The thing is, boy, you have to listen to it. It's calling to you through all the black, telling you to stiffen your resolve. If you listen to what the white is telling you, you can't go wrong.' (p. 109)

²⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

²¹ Though the name of the Major shares little with that of Lurgan Sahib, the Kipling character on which he is modelled, the literal meaning of the name does go a great way to illustrate Kunzru's affinity for employing word games as part of mock satire.

The Major, looking past his initial interest in the boy, has noticed that Pran has something of an Englishman in him. More importantly, he also appears to have decided that there within the creature before him is something worthy of redemption, a temporarily concealed subject fit for reformation. Privett-Clampe does not, like Father Victor and the Reverend Arthur Bennett who apprehend Kim, need written evidence of Pran's claim to whiteness. Unlike Kim, who has his birth certificate, his 'ne varietur', and receipt from the Masonic Lodge strung round his neck, Pran does not have the photo of Ronald Forrester to prove his mixed parentage. It is, however, not called for. His colour has revealed him, and to the Major, this is more than sufficient evidence. Taking the role of a father figure, Privett-Clampe begins a campaign of Anglization, forming Pran in much the same mould as he once was subjected to himself. The initial proceedings, however, prove troublesome as Kunzru's humorous flourishes have brought before the Major a figure that he considers to be little short of an offence to the supposedly noble project he is about to undertake, as well as the those English features his subject is clearly in possession of. The dress Kunzru's character is wearing, therefore, the initial line of defence, becomes the first casualty of the Major's battle against Pran's Indianness:

By the window, on a battered cane chair, sits a large brown-paper parcel. The Major gestures impatiently for Pran to open it. Inside he finds a set of English clothes: short trousers, a white cotton shirt, knee-length woollen stockings with garters to hold them up. There is also a tie and a cap, both rather old and decorated with the same pattern of blue and burgundy stripes. 'Now at least you shan't look like something from a circus. Well, what are you waiting for? Put them on.' A few minutes later Pran is attired as an English schoolboy, minus shoes. [...] The clothes fit rather well, though the collar is too tight. 'Good,' mutters the Major, his eyes bright. 'Very good. We'll have no more of those heathen dresses.' (p. 109)

For Pran, the recognition of his inbred Englishness brings with it the first opportunities of partial, if not full integration into the Anglo-Indian community of Fatehpur. The contours of the road that lay ahead for Kunzru's character begins to take form and, as with Kim whose association with the Irish Mavericks is the first of many chance events that will lead him to a future in the service of the British Government, the surprise gift in the Major's office sees Pran drift further and further away from his childhood Indianness. Yet, while the outcomes may prove to be quite different, the further instalments of this joined project of transformation are significant in the sense that they appear to mirror one another. Kim's lessons in the deceptive ways of the Great Game, for instance, are in no way dissimilar to the scene Kunzru allows to unfold in the office of Privett-Clampe:

After dinner, Lurgan Sahib's fancy turned more to what might be called dressing-up, in which game he took a most informing interest. He could paint faces to a marvel; with a brush-dab here and a line there changing them past recognition. The shop was full of all manner of dresses and turbans, and Kim was apparelled variously as a young Mohammedan of good family, and oilman, and once – which was a joyous evening – as the son of an Oudh landholder in the fullest of full dress. Lurgan Sahib had a hawk's eye to detect the least flaw in the make-up; and lying on a worn teak-wood couch, would explain by the half-hour together how such and such a caste talked, or walked, or coughed, or spat, or sneezed [...] a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith.²²

While Kim is taught to observe the minute details of ethnological data which will allow him 'success as an imperial agent' as well as to become 'master of cross cultural disguise',²³ Pran is with Kunzru's comical reworkings in the process of learning the rudimentary basic of Englishness: 'How perfectly impossible it is to grow a good lawn in India. The positive moral effect of team sports. The unspeakable vileness of Mr. Ghandi, and the lack of hygiene of just about everything'. (p. 250) With the Major's insistence on regular poetry recital, the stern mantra advocating the importance of proper articulation, the crucial 'sound of the labial-dental fricative 'v', as well as the avoidance of forgetting 'to touch the bottom lip to the ridge of the teeth above' (p. 463) begins to produce tangible results. Privett-Clampe's apparent conviction that a good rhyme is all that counts as long as it has 'a clear metre and stirring sentiment' leads to an improved accent alongside an intimate knowledge of household works such as, Kunzru jokingly adds, Kipling's *Gunga Din*. (p. 132)

Though the evident textual similarities of the events which come to allow for Pran's growing knowledge of all that is English go far to further underline the already well established textual relationship of Kunzru and Kipling, the sexual element included in Pran's lessons simultaneously serves to highlight Kunzru's wish to engage as well as oppose the text of *Kim*. Reading Kunzru against the events which take place during Kim's repeated visits to Simla and Lurgan Sahib, the oppositional nature of the later author's revisions accordingly comes to make itself known. While Kim in Simla is taught to deliver 'whole chapters of the Koran by heart' with the 'roll and cadence of a mullah',²⁴ by a highly respected elder, a setting which inspires little other than reserved dignity, the sessions Pran endures as Clive are in contrast for the most part accompanied by the suggestion that the sexual acts which took place during his first meeting with Privett-Clampe in the Chinese room are to be repeated:

²² Kipling, p. 207.

²³ Randall, p. 80.

²⁴ Kipling, p. 217.

And so the recitation continues, Pran starting and being shouted at and stopping and starting and being shouted at and gradually learning to 'puff up' and 'ring it out' and in general put all manner of ingredients into his performance from backbone and grumpton to spirit and feeling, each of them seeming to consist of puffing up and ringing out still more than before, until the puffing and ringing becomes so moving that the Major is inspired to shout 'Tally-ho!' He jams himself up underneath his desk, moaning and bouncing up and down on the swivel chair. By the time Pran reaches the final stanza he is slumped back, a disconnected expression on his green-streaked face. (p. 111)

Though eventually 'the trouser-fiddling stops' (p. 132) and Kunzru reveals that the events of the Chinese room were in fact a singular occurrence, the point remains that Kunzru's reincarnation of Lurgan Sahib is as much a tribute to the empire he is placed to represent as he is a suitable charge of a teenage boy. On a whole, it seems, Kunzru has with the character of the Major been intent on describing a man who has come to be corrupted by his place of power, and who embodies the oftentimes hypocritical behaviour of English rulers; a man who in principal should have been an image of colonial authority and statue, but who instead emerges as a symbol of the evidently flawed system which he is integral to.

As Kunzru's character eventually escapes the confines of the Fatehpur palace and makes his way towards Bombay, yet another pattern of dependant oppositionality begins to take form. The mimicry so clearly present in the earlier sections of *The Impressionist* again adapts to the pattern established by Kipling with the mimicry of Pran proving effective to the point that the cultural boundaries of colonial India are not merely breached, but rather transgressed entirely. Entering Amritsar merely a week after the massacre caused at the orders of General Dyer in April 1919,²⁵ the character who is soon to be appositely renamed 'Pretty Bobby' is for the very first time able to entirely surpass the divides that formerly had marked him as inferior:

'Are you mad?' asks the Sergeant. 'You should be back at the station, or wherever you've been billeted. Where did you come from?' Pran understands. They think he is one of them [...] Pran cannot speak. As soon as he speaks they will know. They will flog him on the whipping post. How can they be so blind? How can they not tell? 'Look at me, boy,' says the Sergeant, the note of gentleness in his voice chiming weirdly with the filthy man prone at his feet. 'Are you all right? Can you tell me your name?' Pran shakes his head mutely [...] He stands as still as he can. One move will betray him. But he must move. Otherwise they will take him away. He points down the street, towards the Civil Lines [...] 'I am going,' he says. 'I am very well.' The soldiers stand, looking at him. The man on the floor scrabbles in the dust with his calloused heels. 'I am very well. I am going. Forthwith.' Pran starts to walk. The Sergeant calls after him, 'Look after yourself.' (p. 186)

Presenting what in fact are the first tangible results of the initial stage of Pran's fantastical voyage of transformation, this brief yet crucial passage clearly demonstrates that Kunzru's

²⁵ Watson, p. 152.

character in earnest has begun to rival that of Kipling's in terms of aptitude for deception, but more significantly, that also the earlier aptitude for mimicry has come to be part of an even more elaborate and far reaching form of cultural travesty. The self-fashioning quest for identity has caused the two main characters to reach a new level of cross-cultural mobility which allows them not only to ascribe successfully to a second identity, but also, it would appear, to gradually inhabit it fully. The Sergeant does not consider any other possibility than that Pran is English. There is no longer any doubt. The selected aspects which formerly would have marked him as a 'half-breed' have come to be complemented by the teachings of the Major. The mould of Englishness is nearing completion as Pran, much like Kim, becomes a cultural hybrid.

In an attempt to charter the strictly sociological implication of the term, Stuart Hall describes hybridity as 'the fusion between different cultural traditions'²⁶ as well as the identities that lay within them. Applied to Kipling and Kunzru, hybridity becomes a manifestation of that already catered for by mimicry, yet with the essential difference that there is no longer a strong sense of affiliation to a particular side of the mimicry 'interchange' as the mimicked selves begin to threaten the position of the original self. What may before have been a diverse, single consciousness of the main characters in question does with the advancement to hybridity become an indeterminate double consciousness where the original self no longer retains a role of superiority. Hybridity, then, is a form of cultural amalgamation that allows the merger of 'difference into sameness, and sameness into difference.'²⁷ In its most rudimentary of forms, Robert Young suggests, hybridity 'implies a disruption and forcing together of any unlike living things',²⁸ in due course creating a new form of existence somewhere between the already established forms. To the white colonizer, therefore, such a process is symptomatic of a weakening colonial divide as it may potentially threaten the supremacy of white colonial culture, but yet, as in the case of Irish boy Kim, hybridity can also take on a role within the colonial endeavour itself, allowing hybridity as well as mimicry to emerge 'as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge'.²⁹

With his particular blend of Irish birth and Indian breeding, Kim utilizes his position between colonizer and colonized to aid British Imperialism. There is never a moment when

²⁶ Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity' in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. by Stuart Hall and others (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 273-316 (p. 310).

²⁷ Robert Young, 'The Cultural Politics of Hybridity', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 158-162 (p. 158).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bhabha, p. 122.

the young boy's disposition for disguise is viewed in any other way than positively, and as he becomes known to the likes of Hurree Chunder Mookerjee and Colonel Creighton, these particular talents receive only encouragement. What is therefore decidedly oppositional about Kunzru in terms of his protagonist's hybridity is that this very aspect so characteristic of Kipling is in reworked guise employed in an effort to undermine the workings of empire rather than support them. With a half-breed boy of Indian appearance capable of crossing racial boundaries with great success, Kunzru does much to oppose 'the traditional view of Kipling as an essentially confident and unquestioning advocate of British hegemony overseas'³⁰ in the sense that he questions what it is that essentially divides an Englishman from an Indian. Unlike with *Kim* where hybridity comes to be something of a prerequisite qualification for those taking part in the Great Game, the story of *The Impressionist* portrays these same aspects in an effort to highlight the questionable nature of imperialism alongside the often misguided notions that have surrounded approaches to racial difference. Kunzru, it seems, has transformed what with Kipling was a celebration of colonial accomplishment to a tale which plays on many of the fears associated with racial supremacy, as the hybridity present in *The Impressionist* puts forward the idea that empire can be successfully infiltrated by the 'oriental' with nothing more than a change of appearance, manner, and speech. There is not, following such a line of thought, an essential difference put in place by nature that cannot be surpassed, and even though identities may become subject to change, a world where black and white may rule on equal terms will not, as Kunzru allows the Headmaster of Chopham Hall to advocate, be left 'in a desperate mess'. (p. 310)

Again adhering to the template of Kipling's maturation novel, the latter sections of *The Impressionist* set out to further elaborate upon the theme of transformation so well established in the foregoing. As Bombay replaces Amritsar and Bobby takes the place previously occupied by Pran, Kunzru's protagonist has truly taken the appearance of a hybrid, gradually learning to be equally at home with the Indian as well as the English. In the care of the Reverend and Elspeth Macfarlane, he is taught to 'write and speak proper English' as well as the 'rudiments of culture'. (p. 235) With Kunzru's once again ascribing to something of Kim's liaison with Lurgan Sahib, Bobby does much in the style of Kipling's protagonist come to be acquainted with the basics of Latin, 'history and English grammar'. (p. 204) As the transformational process that in earnest was begun in the office of Privett-Clampe gains momentum, Kunzru appears increasingly intent on creating a figure who does not merely rival

³⁰ B. J. Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and "Orientalism"* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 179.

the abilities of deception so characteristic of Kipling's protagonist, but also surpasses them. With Bobby's attempts at Englishness enjoying steady advancement, Kunzru portrays a character who step by step is not only perfecting the art of assimilation, but one who is on a path to complete transformation. Though the two diverse yet strangely similar characters have followed much the same voyage of fleeting cross racial deception, their courses appear to separate almost at the journey's point of completion, for while Kim's sense of twin identities remains intact, Kunzru's protagonist strives to relinquish his old self in favour of what appears to be a better new. With a horizon set beyond Chopham Hall, the reinvented St. Xavier's of Kunzru's novel, Jonathan is allowed a place at Oxford, yet in order to achieve this, every last shred of Indianness must, as Kunzru's narration repeatedly proves, be eradicated. Marking a final departure from Kipling, Bridgeman's future lies not in the ability to combine the English and Indian within, but rather in replacing the one with the other.

Completing this task as well as nearing the revision of Kipling, *The Impressionist* accordingly becomes an elaborate but also markedly satirical exercise in the combined study of every opinion, mannerism, habit, and smell that is considered to be a mark of Englishness. Unlike Kim who was satisfied to display a successful act of deception, Kunzru's character strives not only to adhere to the model upon which he has come to rely with his ambitious project of chameleon-like Anglicisation, but he aspires to become the very model itself, taking hold of, as Said had phrased it, the 'reality, language, and thought'³¹ of the white man and learning to feel 'certain things and not others.'³² Gaining the proportions of almost a reversed anthropological study, the sole concern of Bobby's waking hours comes to be the tedious examination and documentation of all that is English: Theories are in due course devised and tested in practice. The setbacks that arise are duly noted and their causes deducted. Every conceivable trait that might provide a clue to becoming a little less Indian and a little more English is studied in minute detail, with the hope that it in the future will lead to the full, rather than partial, Anglicisation of the oriental self. For every page that is turned of *The Impressionist*, Kunzru's protagonist appears to come one step closer to fully acquiring the name, tastes, language, and appearance of an Englishman. Therefore, when Bridgeman, having taken the guise of Kunzru's fully English protagonist, enters the fictional Barabbas College at the beginning of Michaelmas term 1922, there is a strong sense of completion as Kunzru gives the distinct impression that the unlikely project of self-fashioning is about to succeed as Bridgeman, at long last, is within reach of the existence he at this point has been

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 227.

³² Ibid.

striving towards for the better part of four years. Where Kipling made Kim a full worthy ‘cog in the imperial machine’,³³ it would appear that Kunzru allows Jonathan the fortune of securing a place within one of the most prestigious educational institutions of the western world, strikingly positioned, it must be noted, at the very heart of the British Empire.

In her analysis of Kunzru’s novel, Nishat Haider remarks that ‘*The Impressionist* is an inversion of Kipling’s *Kim*’ based on the observation that the latter ‘celebrates the Empire and its role in ‘civilizing’ the world’, while the former extravagantly ‘mocks all the well-known symbols of the Empire.’³⁴ As Kunzru’s protagonist is drawn steadily deeper into the sombre world of interwar Britain, it becomes increasingly clear that this is very much the case. Although the rise of a figure who was an outcast even in middleclass India to become part of the British aristocracy may have seemed an act of opposition great enough, it is nonetheless apparent that in doing so, Kunzru has, by means of supplying nearly every romanticised image and conception of the imperial era as a farcical caricature of its earlier self, come to be guilty of satirising most all aspects of the imperial project that could conceivably lend themselves to criticism. Though both works, albeit in their own manner, go quite some way to oppose the acceptance of colonial stability, the foregoing has most importantly shown that it is as a means to this end that mimicry and hybridity have provided Kunzru with the premier basis for his evident oppositionality. With *The Impressionist*, the colonial hero of Kipling’s quest romance so famous for his efforts in the service of the colonial endeavour has through inversion become emblematic of all the unfortunate aspects of empire. Rather than emerging as the symbol of British achievement abroad that can arguably be found in Kipling’s novel, Kunzru’s efforts of playful revision have produced an emblem of the difficulties, idiosyncrasies, as well as profound bewilderment caused by the founding assumptions of imperial colonialization.

By relying on the best of English bildungsroman traditions, Kunzru has succeeded in portraying the Kiplingesque struggles of a child who is born to several worlds at once. By allowing the rise of Pran Nath from Agra street urchin to Oxford anthropology student, Kunzru’s character has joined that of Kipling in the conquering of the colonial world. Yet, despite this largely common story of self-development, the joined tales of Pran Nath and Kimball O’Hara nonetheless come to end on a somewhat differing note. By not permitting the almost fully anglicized Bridgeman to settle into a tranquil existence as his transformed self,

³³ Sullivan, p. 172.

³⁴ Nishat Haider, ‘Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist*: A Multilayered Bildungsroman Interrogating Diasporic Paradigm’, *South Asian Review*, 25 (2004), 113-23 (p. 119).

and instead causing him to pursue Star Chapel, his final but also fatal objective, Kunzru's character remains a figure of deep-felt unrest which Kim, at the conclusion of Kipling's novel, was not. Where Kipling has allowed Kim to successfully become one with the world of maps, documents, and espionage, Kunzru consequently introduces yet another hindrance for his protagonist: Though Kim may have found a future which in a sense has allowed him to regain some of his beloved bazaar existence, Jonathan is yet again launched into a flux of self searching trials that in due course will lead him away from the English life he has constructed. As Kipling's novel draws to a close, Kim appears, as Said also remarks in the novel's introduction, to have arrived at a sense of 'identity that he can be comfortable with'.³⁵ For at last bound to the Great Game, Kim has gained certain recognition of his place and role in the world, and having finally found 'the River of the Arrow', Kipling's protagonist has fulfilled his task of aiding the lama in his quest. Yet in contrast, the final pages of Kunzru's sixth chapter are devoted to a character who appears unwillingly unable to keep in check his previously crucial aptitude for change. Bridgeman, quite clearly, is still to arrive at a new self capable of resisting his incessant need for perpetual transformation suggesting, perhaps, that Kunzru's protagonist in what to come is at the mercy of forces that, although occasioned by the workings of empire, in the future will continue to be in play despite the eventual termination of colonialism. Linking the respective halves of Bridgeman's divided self to the nations from which they stem, the analogy becomes almost unavoidable: Much as the culture of the British colonizers is not easily removed from the colonies which were under imperial rule, Bridgeman cannot rid himself of his own mixed, Anglo-Indian heritage. Although Kunzru's multifarious protagonist has come to be removed from India and to most purposes becomes a vision of Englishness, his aptitude for cultural transformation has left him caught somewhere between his split selves. Despite the efforts of Kunzru's shape-shifting protagonist, his aspirations to be English have not entirely defeated the Indian within, leaving his hybridized self, much as a greater proportion of the postcolonial world itself, trapped between two opposed yet equally present cultures.

While Kipling's now more than a century old maturation story did much to examine the immediate consequences of British colonization that produced Kim, Kunzru's revised edition accordingly seeks to comment upon the long term and indeed future repercussions of imperialization. The study of the use Kunzru has made of Kipling is therefore first and foremost the study of a textual relationship characterized by common features, but more

³⁵ Kipling, p. 39.

importantly, it is one clearly marked by conflicting agendas. At every junction where the text of *Kim* has allowed for it, *The Impressionist* attempts to take things one or even several steps further, with the result, it would appear, that Kunzru's text has become capable of commenting upon the postcolonial rather than colonial implications of Kipling's original. The characters resemble one another. The concepts of mimicry and hybridity, as well as their almost inherent implications of cross cultural transfer when set into play within a setting colonial India, quite clearly reappear in Kunzru's text. Though sharing the recurring theme of recognizable transformation, exaggeration, and elaboration present already with Forster, the amendments to Kipling bear the marks of having been tailored to fit a particular purpose: By revising Kipling's colonial maturity story to fit an amended agenda, Kunzru has created a character with a conflict of identity typical to the world that has come into existence in the wake of colonialism, but also, it seems, a contextualised Kipling well suited to a postcolonial audience.

III. CONRAD:

THE JUNGLE RIVER REVISITED

Providing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with its central setting, the jungle river that to the mind of Charles Marlow seemed to make its way through the map of Africa 'like a snake'¹ not only offers a venue for the seaman's voyage of 'inconclusive experiences',² but also a hive of allusion and symbolic reference. At first appearances, *Heart of Darkness* is of course a quest tale that takes a lone traveller from the far reaches of the subcontinent to its dark and unknown interior. Still, immediately below the surface of carefully chosen phrases lurks a great deal of ambiguity, evasiveness, and mysticism, which combined with what Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* has called 'the imperial attitude' contemporary to 'the late nineteenth century',³ makes for a text that relates closely to the theme of colonial mastery and exploitation. In the mind of the reading public, *Heart of Darkness* remains a strong point of common reference for any colonial as well as postcolonial work, and for any later text including the tell-tale river symbol, Conrad almost inescapably emerges as a model of inspiration. The presence, therefore, of a jungle river as well as a steam boat expedition very similar to that of Conrad in the final chapter of *The Impressionist*, clearly points to a relation of textual interconnectedness, but more importantly, it signals Kunzru's wish to engage in the now popular task of revising Conrad's novella to suit a postcolonial cause.

Conrad, still feeling that 'a debt must be paid for his own Congo journey'⁴ that had taken place almost ten years before the publication of the story in 1899, wrote the novella in

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Paul B. Armstrong, 4th edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 10.

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 24.

⁴ Albert J. Guerard, 'The Journey Within', in *Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes: A Casebook*, ed. by C. B. Cox (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 52.

an attempt to register his ‘abhorrence of King Leopold’s rape’⁵ of the Congo Free State, and as a response to the many atrocities he had gained firsthand knowledge of during his tour of the region. Though Conrad’s narrative certainly allows for a critical perspective on the undertakings of his era, the mindset of the period remains within *Heart of Darkness* producing, as Patrick Brantlinger has remarked, ‘a powerful critique of at least some manifestations of imperialism and racism’.⁶ What is noteworthy of Conrad’s particular form of critique is that it is offered in ways that paradoxically can be characterized ‘only as imperialist and racist’,⁷ hiding, in a manner of speaking, an agenda of criticism behind the pretence of a colonialist approval. With *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad treads a fine line between imperialist complicity and opposition to colonialism which has led to an array of remarkably varied responses, ranging from Chinua Achebe’s allegations of overt racism to latter day studies deeming potentially racist aspects as little other than period traits within an agenda of imperialist disapproval. It is this inconclusive suggestiveness with its range of potential interpretations that is much the cause of the elevated position *Heart of Darkness* has found within the colonial canon, and it is also this very same ambiguity which Kunzru has seen fit to utilise with *The Impressionist* when he allows his protagonist to follow Professor Chapel’s Fotse expedition into the heart of an imaginary and elaborate Africa. Adhering to much the same practice as with the foregoing authors, Kunzru has stripped what remains of the imperialist romanticism in Conrad, and reduced it, again by means of playful revision, to a humorous parody concealing immediately below its surface a stark critique of the colonial system. Though Conrad was bound by the contemporary necessity for ‘pretty fictions’ that would largely ‘conceal imperialism’s actual business’,⁸ Kunzru, it seems, has set out to do what his predecessor could not. By an intricate route, *The Impressionist* joins Conrad in his criticism of imperial exploitation, yet where *Heart of Darkness* falters, Kunzru postcolonial agenda allows him to proceed where the earlier author, it would appear, only strived to go.

Already within the descriptions of the ocean liner finally reaching its port, present in the first paragraphs of Kunzru’s final chapter, the first clues to the use that has been made of Conrad are evident. Though the scene as such may not be identical to Conrad, it nonetheless appears to be constructed from fragments of the many incidents, people, and places Charles Marlow encounters as he travels from the government seat on the coast to the Lower Station,

⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Kurtz’s “Darkness” and *Heart of Darkness*’, in *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader*, ed. by Peter Childs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 191-200 (p. 193).

⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Andrea White, ‘Conrad and Imperialism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 179-202 (p. 191).

and finally by foot to the Central Station. Though Kunzru never discloses the precise location, (the Congo, for instance, is never mentioned) the arrival of the Chapel expedition at an administrative stronghold at the mouth of a river clearly highlights Kunzru's intention to mirror Conrad, and although there initially is little else in the form of textual features that contribute to establishing a relation of textual co-dependence, there still remains much which on various levels emphasises the evident link. There is, for instance, the political officer named Smith⁹ who, among other things, appears to play a role in the Northern administration's proposed 'institution of a hut tax' that due to the fact that the Fotse remain largely unchartered, necessitates the census Jonathan is forced to conduct. Much as the Chief Accountant Marlow is acquainted with at the Central Station, this character is also a man of accounts, charts, and correct entries, in addition to being a source of information for the newcomers. When Marlow one afternoon during his ten day stay at the station joins the accountant in his office, he is informed of the fact that he 'in the interior [...] will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz', 'a first class agent [...] at present in charge of a trading post',¹⁰ in much the same way that Smith 'closets himself with the Professor' to reveal the terms of the expedition's travel permit as well as the bombshell news that 'the government has had considerably more contact with the Fotse'. (p. 428) Both men, the official representatives of empire, serve the purpose of invoking a sense of uncertainty regarding what lies ahead. To Kunzru's anthropologist, the news that there has been extensive contact with the Fotse, the premier bugbear of their endeavour, is a decidedly bad omen for the remainder of the expedition, while in the case of Marlow, the accountant's characterization of Kurtz as a 'very remarkable person'¹¹ only emphasises the unresolved yet justified forebodings of Conrad's protagonist.

Adding to this, there is also Kunzru's inventive inclusion of Famous, 'big boy' (p. 426) of the Imperial River Club and the servant assigned the task of escorting the expedition to the decaying bungalow at the centre of settlement life. Though his name conjures associations of the queer remarks made by the old doctor who examines Marlow; 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too',¹² this character most importantly serves the purpose of providing another example of Kunzru's humorous redevelopment of Conrad. As subject of

⁹ Curiously, once Smith has left, Gittens remarks on the fact that he was 'got up as a Belgian naval officer'. (p. 429) If anything, this feature, though clearly not in keeping with the character of the General Accountant, may on Kunzru's part be construed as something of a sly reference to Marlow's seamanship and the fact that he had found employment with a Belgian trading company.

¹⁰ Conrad, p. 19.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 11.

comparison, there is something to be said for Famous as a reworking of the village chief who Fresleven, Marlow's predecessor, assaulted as the result of an argument over 'two black hens'.¹³ Because he believed he had been wronged in some form of bargain, the Dane retaliated by whacking the 'old nigger mercilessly' with a stick and did not stop, as Marlow imparts, before the chief's son, with spear in hand, struck the white man 'between the shoulder-blades'.¹⁴ A similar yet much more comical scene reappears in *The Impressionist* with Famous as he, during his second and final appearance, is chased by Marchant, one of the two latecomers to Chapel's expedition, brandishing, as Kunzru puts it, a tennis racket:

'Famous, are you?' he shouts, whacking the African with the racket. 'What for, eh? What for?' 'Please,' says Famous, edging away from him. 'Please?' 'Don't you understand, sambo?' laughs the man. 'I said' – thwack! – 'how' – thwack! – 'did you' – thwack! – 'get so famous?' (p. 430)

Rather than the disbelief displayed by the villagers in *Heart of Darkness*, the sight of Famous being hit is received with amusement. The African servant, of course, is not killed, yet the significance of his beating can be found in the fact that Kunzru has attempted to ascribe a conflicting meaning to an otherwise similar phenomenon. Fresleven's stick is, in one of Kunzru's many comical turns, replaced by a tennis racket in an effort to mark the event as a display of ridicule rather than as an example of the erratic cruelty forcefully exerted by foreign colonizers such as Conrad's Dane.

More powerful still, though, is the attempt in this particular section of *The Impressionist* to capture and also partially amend what may only be described as the continuously underlying darkness and sense of doom of Conrad's novella, which through the character of Bridgeman remarkably takes place alongside an otherwise playful account of the expedition proceedings. Kunzru, it appears, has attempted to ascribe to the solemn mysticism of Conrad's much discussed 'brooding gloom',¹⁵ the casually inferred yet unrelenting feeling of removed pessimism which remains with *Heart of Darkness* practically throughout, and provides Conrad's text with its somewhat sinister if not rather oppressive tone. Though Marlow and Bridgeman at first share a common enthusiasm for the prospect of exploring Africa, this diminishes quickly, and for both characters gradually leads into a general sense of apprehension regarding the venture they are to embark upon as well as what they will find when they reach their final destination. Though both Conrad and Kunzru's protagonist at first

¹³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

rejoice at the idea of travel - Bridgeman with his prestigious expedition place, and Marlow with his relief at having found employment as well as childhood dreams of exploring the enigmatic river - it is not long before their prospects take on a less welcoming form and give rise to a somewhat peculiar sense of uneasiness. For Marlow, the first sign of his journey's ominous character is brought home with his visit to the Trading Company head offices: At first there is the clerk with whom he develops 'a vein of joviality'. Though very enthusiastic about the business of the company, the 'shabby and careless' character is soon to make it clear that he does not wish to venture abroad himself. 'I am not such a fool as I look',¹⁶ he answers, leaving Marlow with only misgivings and without any further explanations. Just a little later there is also the doctor, who appears much more occupied with his own semi-scientific methods of crania measurement¹⁷ 'of those going out there' than with Marlow's medical well being. 'Good! Good for there',¹⁸ the old man mumbles, as he feels Marlow's pulse. When asked what his studies have revealed concerning those who return from the African interior, his answer is extraordinarily enough that he does not see them. Somewhat disconcertingly, it is not revealed whether it is because he chooses not to, or because his subjects of study never return. With Conrad's added inclusion of the two women knitting 'black wool feverishly' and presiding over the waiting room with 'downcast eyes', the sense that there is 'something ominous in the atmosphere'¹⁹ is only enhanced further. The women, it seems, are significant as they do much to invoke a greater field of symbolic reference, guarding, as Marlow remarks, 'the door of darkness',²⁰ yet their presence implying that a journey to the wilderness, the dark place at the earth's centre, is also, rather gravely, the descent past the gates of doom and into the depths of hell from which few ever return unscathed.

Much of the same tone re-emerges in *The Impressionist* as Bridgeman, having just overcome his initial unwillingness towards the idea of the expedition, stumbles across his first cause for concern as he studies the glossary of Fotse language he borrows from Professor Chapel. 'Compiled by Père Antoine Bertrand, a nineteenth-century French Jesuit', (p. 400) the hand scribbled pages give Jonathan cause for misgiving as the selection of words appear to relate more and more to the concepts of 'chance and possibility' as well as witchcraft, but

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11

¹⁷ Clearly an illustrative example of contemporary scientific method, the very same practice of crania measurement interestingly reoccurs with Kunzru in the form of Reverend Macfarlane's pastimes. Though there is very little to suggest that Conrad's doctor in any way has provided a model for this particular character, it nonetheless appears that Kunzru on one level is attempting to recreate something of Conrad's colonial milieu with this re-emerging, period feature.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

worse still, the context in which they appear points to what can only be construed as the author's pressing fear for his own safety. Following this, there is the wave of paranoia that hits Jonathan on the train to Paris. Having found a place in the buffet car, he is overtaken by a growing discomfort, rooted, as Kunzru describes it, in 'something deeper'. (p. 404) 'The fields pass by outside the window.' (p. 404) For every minute that passes he is farther removed from the England and Oxford he has come to know. Bridgeman is travelling on the way to somewhere new, and the realisation of this, emphasised by 'the lilt of spoken French' and 'the unfamiliar typeface of the menu card', fills him with a sudden fear of what is to come. A new continent is on the horizon, but disconcertingly, so is also the advent of another alteration. Where Marlow is possessed by a sensation of indeterminable distrust, Bridgeman grows faint at the thought of yet another change, another self, and another environment to which he in some way will have to adapt. Undoubtedly only adding to his paranoia, the 'red-eyed men squatting in the compound at the Empire Exhibition' (p. 396) enter his mind as models of what he might become, and when his plans of marriage to Star are eventually terminated, he knows something bad is ahead, a looming sense of transformation, something different he dreads will not be a change for the better. Africa is 'reaching out towards him', (p. 411) and there is no longer a reason to keep hold of Englishness, no longer a reason to return. Marlow's apprehensions regarding Kurtz and Africa, it would appear, have with Kunzru become Bridgeman's fear of his own uncanny yet inevitable capacity for change.

The moment Jonathan is faced with the sensation of Africa itself, he stares at it 'with uneasy recognition' (p. 423) partly because he is about to enter a region of the world he has spent years doing his utmost to suppress, but more importantly because he senses that he is aware of what it will bring. 'He knows the logic at work'. The system, as Kunzru puts it, is 'etched into his skin'. (p. 424) Just as the prow of the liner aboard which he has arrived 'looms over the port', (p. 423) the notion that some sort of grave mistake has been made oppresses his mind. There is something that appears to be out of place, something that is wrong. Marlow too shares these sentiments as he comes upon the man-of-war firing haphazard shots into the bush, a proceeding, he remarks, that has 'a touch of insanity'²¹ about it - an air of the surreal. In *Heart of Darkness*, this particular event serves to highlight the all too common opinion of the colonizers that the Africans constituted nothing less than an enemy, yet in light of *The Impressionist*, it brings attention to the peculiar position Kunzru's protagonist finds himself in at time of arrival. Kunzru's playful reworkings have caused the

²¹ Ibid., p. 14.

sombre white explorer, the fearless representative of empire, to become a character with sympathies both with the colonizers and the colonized. With his quickly changing self, Bridgeman could, to make a point, just as easily have been part of the crew aboard the man-of-war as among the natives hiding in the undergrowth. Subjected to Kunzru's elaborate postcolonial games, Marlow is transformed into a character who stands somewhere between the stark oppositions of race and nationality, as Jonathan is able to pose as enemy and ally as well as colonizer and colonized at the very same time, poignantly underlining, it would appear, the arbitrariness of race and colour in addition to the inherently fluctuating 'stability of colonial identity.'²²

Though few characters, settings, or events in this section of *The Impressionist* fail comparison with Conrad in some form, the link to *Heart of Darkness* appears to be at its very strongest at the point where the river and indeed the freshwater steamer are introduced. In both texts, the initial hindrances that have stood in the way of the river journey have been overcome and departure is imminent. The long awaited rivets have finally arrived at the Central Station. Marlow has been able to complete the arduous task of rescuing his steamer from the mud 'at the bottom of the river'.²³ Similarly, in *The Impressionist*, Gregg and Marchant have been accepted by the expedition members, and the somewhat controversial matter of the census has been resolved by assigning the task in its entirety to Jonathan. At last, the white man is to enter the darkness of the African interior, and as the Chapel expedition leaves behind the government station and begins the journey up river, Kunzru's steamboat does so with the unavoidable presence of Conrad's enigmatic protagonist and his river going vessel:

Their steamer is waiting for them, wallowing at a riverside mooring a couple of miles up from the coast. It is an uninspiring sight: a square float-bottomed hull with a flimsy roof over the top that was once painted white, but years of service have turned it more or less entirely rust red. A single large paddle-wheel squats at the rear, its blades patched in several places. Forward, a pair of narrow funnels rise from the boiler, jutting through the roof behind the wheelhouse, which is a kind of knocked-together shed accessible by a ladder. A barely legible sign on its side proclaims this good ship *Nelly*.²⁴ (p. 434)

²² Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 196.

²³ Conrad, p. 21.

²⁴ The vessel that provides the setting for the well known opening scene of Conrad's novel is named the *Nellie*. Accordingly, there is much to suggest that the name of Kunzru's river steamer is derived from that of Conrad's 'cruising yawl'.

In spite of Kunzru's reworkings, the traces of the steamer at Marlow's charge are easily detectable. The 'small cabin built of light planks'²⁵ has become 'a kind of 'knocked-together shed', the single funnel projecting through the 'light roof supported on stanchions'²⁶ is transformed into 'a pair of narrow funnels', and the fore-mounted boiler with the 'machinery right astern'²⁷ is the very same. With this, an interchange of textual commonalities begins, with *The Impressionist* displaying one reworked feature after the other, twisting, amending and modifying Conrad, but importantly, never doing so beyond the point of recognition. The steps, it would appear, are retraceable, and the presence of Conrad is never disguised. Knowingly, Kunzru has kept *Heart of Darkness* at an arm's length; close enough to maintain an easily recognizable dialogue of textual exchange, yet sufficiently distant to allow for the eventual alternate applications of *The Impressionist*.

As the steamboats begin to trawl through the dense undergrowth on their way to interior of the continent, the battle with the pull and tug of the dirty river water has begun. Flowing mercilessly to the coasts, the voyagers must overcome the water's natural direction of travel if they are to make their way into the heart of the uncharted land, surpassing the challenges of the treacherous jungle, but also contending with the effects it has on their ill adjusted western minds. Through the thicket of Marlow's confusion, 'his misrecognitions' and the confusion of the 'discrepancies between what he shows and what he sees',²⁸ there can be detected a fear of the effect the jungle is having on his mind. Faced with Conrad's powerful jungle, Marlow battles with the 'late Victorian fear of the white man's deterioration',²⁹ the always present danger of being overcome by one's surroundings and giving in to the oppressive jungle. In similar fashion, Jonathan must also contend with the prospects of spiritual decay, but unlike Marlow who stands in danger of losing himself, Kunzru's protagonist is haunted by the possibilities of what he may become alongside the notion of removal from his hard earned Englishness. He is scared of once again assimilating chameleon-like to the environment in which he is placed, fearing that he may reach a point where he completely loses himself in a swarm of make believe identities which inevitably, it seems to be suggested, may lead into a terrifying state of nothingness. With Kunzru, the white man's fear of the unknown is replaced by the bi-racial individual's fear of assimilation, of being subjected to a succession of changes so frequent and far reaching that he will finally be

²⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 28.

²⁹ Guerard, p. 51.

left trapped in a blankness between selves, forever bound to an incomplete identity between identities.

As they delve further and further into the darkness, Marlow and Bridgeman become completely removed from the outer world. The river, it seems, has the power to return those who travel upon it to a state of the primeval, transforming the travellers to beings that exist away from worldly confines so familiar to them. All but the river and the steady progression of the steamer has become inconsequential, and the former lives of those aboard the vessels are reduced to distant memories hidden from the conscious mind. The darkness, seeping from the undergrowth that shelters the uplifting rays of the sun is soon to become also the darkness of the minds, and as one bend replaces another, the monotony of the unchanging scenery unites Kunzru's and Conrad's protagonists in a battle with mental delusions. Marlow, for instance, feels that reality is fading, yet true to Kunzru's habit of exaggeration, Bridgeman comes to be obsessed with the notion that his 'boundaries have dissolved altogether and he is lost', that he is confined to a world 'bereft of still points' in which he is no longer certain 'about who or where or why he is'. (p. 443) There is no turning back. The powers of the jungle are upon them. To them both, the voyage is much like a bad dream from which they cannot awake, a returning nightmare that transforms the darkness of the river banks into the darkness of their souls, conjuring forth the demons lurking in their subconscious. As a result, innocent looking features on the riverbank one after one gain undue prominence with 'the fringe of green trees' (p. 436) towering down on them and the dusk time flickering of the shoreline constituting an ominous pattern in the eyes of an affected mind. As light gives way to darkness, Marlow and Bridgeman are, despite the somewhat ironic tone of Kunzru's narration, bound together by a shared premonition of what, it will be revealed, is to become a differing evil. For days at a time, the river voyagers are isolated from time and space. They are taken back to the beginning of the world, a place that has not seen change since the dawn of time; a place seemingly unscathed by the misdoings of mankind:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands. You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert and butted all day long against shoals trying to find the channel till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once – somewhere – far away – in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants and water and silence. And this

stillness of life did not in the least resemble peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.³⁰

Discernable through Conrad's prose is Marlow's apprehensive curiosity regarding his destination at the very centre of the African interior. He is bound by the relentless course of the river to arrive at a set destination, but he does not know precisely what it is that lies ahead. Just as Bridgeman, he is blindly following the only pathway through the otherwise impenetrable and ancient forest, and it is at least in part this pressing sensation of uncertainty that Kunzru has attempted to recreate with the closely mirrored journey of *The Impressionist*. Once again there is a mention of trees as well as a strong allusion to Africa as something unknown and dangerous. The strong sense of inevitable and of predetermined movement reoccurs. Bridgeman, it appears, is following the rhythmic beats of Marlow's steamer into a new dimension:

There are no surprises, except from the land. Jonathan is waiting to be swallowed by towering forest trees, to feel he is approaching the primeval heart of a little-known continent: this is what happens when you go up an African river. Yet instead of closing in, the country opens up, the skies widening and the foliage on the banks thinning to tracts of low acacia scrub. Along the banks the settlements are fewer. The European trading posts space themselves further apart and the native villages get smaller, meaner looking. The one positive thing about the tedium of life on the boat is the sense of travelling in a straight line, of sedate movement from a beginning towards some guaranteed end. Little by little this ebbs away, the line of water unfolding another dimension, that of the truly unfamiliar, the unforeseen. (p. 437)

Much beyond doubt, it is clear that Kunzru is attempting to ascribe to Conrad's sinister mysticism. At least at first appearances, the spirit of Conrad is recaptured as Kunzru succeeds to replicate a selection of the traits so typical of Conradian symbolism. Seemingly, it is the same jungle, the same river, and the same steamer, yet allegorically *The Impressionist* diverges as Bridgeman's voyage, certainly in terms of overall significance, takes a somewhat different direction to that of Marlow. Instead of the progressive narrowing in on Kurtz, the one single and highly important target, Bridgeman appears to be moving into a world that invokes a steadily more powerful experience of being lost in an infinity, a great empty space of which not even a small section is fully his own. In place of the certainty of the reader that Marlow will resolve the issue of Kurtz in one way or other, a lurking sense of uncertainty seeps through the final pages of Kunzru's novel, a premonition, perhaps, that the final transformation of Kunzru's protagonist will be the most significant and far-reaching yet.

³⁰ Conrad, p. 34.

In the context of *The Impressionist*, then, the African river has gained new meaning as the themes so commonly attributed to Conrad, for instance the significance of Marlow's up-river voyage as a return to the mother of civilization, or as a careful exposure of the colonialist violence in the Congo, are put to use with the intention of mocking the pretences advocated by the imperial endeavour as well as adding commentary to the inner conflicts of Kunzru's protagonist. Therefore, where Conrad's narrative is dominated by Marlow's determined mission of retrieving Kurtz, Kunzru's discourse allows Bridgeman increasingly less direction and determination. There remain no genuine incentives at the river's end to spur him on. Even his role as fellow anthropologist has been taken away from him. The return to England will no longer allow him to marry Star Chapel, and in no way does his demeanour resemble that of a 'lone adventurer [...] inscribing the English character on a blank land.' He is, as Kunzru puts it, reduced to being 'some kind of tax inspector', (p. 433) a far cry from Marlow's fearless accomplishment as well as the romantic notion of the white man as saviour of the eastern world. In Africa, Bridgeman emerges as a figure bereft of the hope, will, and conviction formerly found in Conrad's protagonist. The love of his life has, somewhat ironically, been lost to a black man named Sweets, and the Fotses have been spoiled by the presence of other western explorers. As member of an expedition party that somewhat jokingly came into being as a result of Professor Chapel's far developed obsessive compulsiveness and consequent need to escape Oxford, Bridgeman, alongside the expedition itself, gradually emerges as a symbol of colonialist failure rather than achievement.

With Kunzru's amendments, the river journey quite clearly comes to form the basis for a further commentary and critique upon the true agenda of violent exploitation and economic gain lurking behind the seemingly noble pretences of spreading 'the light of civilization'³¹ so common to the colonialist enterprise. Ascribing to Conrad's ambivalence towards imperialism with his rather more overt form of postcolonial opposition, Kunzru appears intent on describing an expedition that is not worthy of anything other than ridicule, and consequently seeks to not only uncover the corrupted agenda's of self betterment and gain which have brought them to Africa, but also to reveal the pretences which have allowed Chapel and his expedition the prestigious cover for their eventually entirely futile expedition. With Kunzru's satirical revelations of backward colonial bureaucracy, internal conflict, and disillusionment, the idea of the imperial project as a 'divinely ordained and historically determined agency of bringing the earth under rational rule',³² though contended by Conrad, comes to be truly put

³¹ F. A. Inamdar, *Image and Symbol in Joseph Conrad's Novels* (Jaipur: Panchsheel Prakashan, 1979), p. 47.

³² Parry, p. 24.

aside with the latter sections of *The Impressionist*. After all, the feature of imperialism which to Conrad brought with it the greatest distaste was the ‘lying propaganda’ so frequently ‘used to cover its bloody tracks’,³³ and in remade form the Chapel expedition highlights as well as offers ridicule of these very concepts. The greater part of Kunzru’s expedition is not driven by the noble anthropological cause but rather a quest for prestige and recognition. Bridgeman is part of a tour that he would not have joined had it not been for the greater standing he would have come to enjoy upon its successful return. Central to these common convictions, however, is the firm belief in the rightfulness of British imperialism, yet in the midst of Kunzru’s repeated ridicule of these very assumptions it is striking that Bridgeman is the only one who does not share them to the full. Unlike Conrad, Kunzru has, by route of a bi-racial protagonist, allowed for a perspective other than purely that of the exploring white man once again in an effort to forward the cause of his postcolonial contentions.

In her study of Conrad and imperialism, Benita Parry argues that *Heart of Darkness* does not succeed in dramatizing ‘a political struggle between coloniser and colonised’,³⁴ by limiting its portrayal of the Congo to the perspective of a white man. The ‘blacks’, she claims, do not ‘constitute a human presence’ as they do not serve as ‘functional protagonists’.³⁵ However, with the advent of Kunzru’s postcolonial amendments such a struggle is allowed to take place within the confines of the main protagonist’s divided self as this one multifarious character appears able to cater for a handful of racial nuances at the very same time. As Kunzru’s steamer makes its way up the river, Bridgeman the coloniser is tugged and pulled every which way by the colonised subjects repressed within. In a manner of speaking, Pran Nath, Rukhsana, and Pretty Bobby appear to re-emerge once he sets foot in Africa, pounding, as it were, at his acquired Englishness and knocking chip after chip off the facade he has masterfully composed. When faced with the Africans themselves, the newly arrived explorer struggles to come to terms with the ‘instant effect’ (p. 433) of his presence - the natural assumption of mastery he has strived for. Torn between his current role as imperial ruler and former role as colonial subject, Bridgeman’s hard earned mask of westernization begins to display cracks. He is, as he tells himself, ‘only pretending’, (p. 433) yet reverting to one of his former and indeed less intimidating selves proves to be a task too hard. The changes he has undergone are not easily reversed. The marks of colonialism, Kunzru appears once again to be commenting, are not easily removed.

³³ Brantlinger, p. 194.

³⁴ Parry, p. 33.

³⁵ Ibid.

Once deep within the jungle, the earth to Marlow ‘seemed unearthly’, a place of estrangement that ‘wore the aspect of an unknown planet’,³⁶ though interestingly with Bridgeman a similar sensation is accompanied with a sense of recognition. The state of Conrad’s protagonist is one of bewilderment at the disagreeable realization that he, travelling upon the river, no longer is at liberty to look upon Africa as ‘the shackled form of a conquered monster’ as has become the custom of the white man, but rather as a beast roaming ‘monstrous and free’.³⁷ With Conrad, colonial mastery is gradually replaced by colonial subordination. Man no longer rules in such a place as the interior of Africa, but nature itself, the governing force of all things, has taken charge and diminished the soldiers of imperialism to fickle beings, reduced to fighting the waters of the wilderness with no greater goal than simple survival. For Marlow, Africa is, in the words of Parry, ‘the negation of his own humanly-dominated and dynamic social order, a domain where archaic energies are rampant and nature’s exercise of an autonomous will is unlimited.’³⁸ As one bend follows another in orderly succession, Marlow is faced with a growing sense of alienation as the further into the jungle he travels, the further removed he is from the pantheons of western power. However, where Conrad’s protagonist is faced with his own inferiority, Kunzru’s character finds the equally intimidating milieu to hold qualities that are strangely recognizable to him. The ‘oriental’ within slowly surfaces as he almost instinctively makes tracks to adapt to the new environment, as there on some level is something about Africa that conjures forth a part of Bridgeman he had forgotten existed. Marlow’s ‘conquered monster’ may be free, but Bridgeman, it would appear, has a way of taming it. In the case of Conrad, imperial superiority comes to be defeated by the jungle’s ‘concealed life’,³⁹ yet with Kunzru, the colonial half of the split self re-emerges as the only possible means of survival when faced with the wilderness of the subcontinent. With redevelopments of *The Impressionist* the fears of the white man remains, yet contrasting them is now the fearlessness of the colonial subject who is at one with the jungle and does not perceive it as an enemy. Rather than what was only partially the case with Conrad’s jungle, Kunzru’s is to be a place in which the colonial subject may come to dominate and where the white man is bound to be at his mercy.

As both steamers come in reach of their destination, a new set of common textual features emerge as many of the incidents that in *Heart of Darkness* occur just prior to arrival at the river’s end and the inner station have also found a place with Kunzru. Eventually the

³⁶ Conrad, p. 37.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Parry, p. 32.

³⁹ Conrad, p. 26.

Chapel expedition reaches a divide in the water, ‘a fork in the river’, that is followed immediately by a steadily tighter passage: ‘a channel that is suddenly narrow, little more than twice the *Nelly*’s width.’ (p. 437) These occurrences, it seems, share a great deal with a section of Marlow’s account:

We had just floundered and flopped round a bend when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind, but as we opened the reach more I perceived it was the head of a long sandbank or rather a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discoloured, just awash, and the whole lot was seen just under the water exactly as a man’s backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin.⁴⁰

Bringing again to the forefront Kunzru’s little disguised ambition to engage with Conrad by means of shared textual features, *The Impressionist* replicates the earlier work in remodelled yet undeniably similar form. In the pages that follow much the same practice is continued as *Heart of Darkness* repeatedly resides just below the surface of the later narrative, initially detectable, of course, as Kunzru’s steamer at last ‘comes upon a crumbling jetty’ with ‘wooden pillars splayed out at precarious angles’ (p. 437) that is decidedly reminiscent of the one ‘that projected into the river’⁴¹ onto which Marlow disembarks the sea-going steamer at the outer station. When the anthropological expedition finds moorings on the bank opposite the landing, they too are subjected to an attack by natives just as Marlow and the pilgrims before. The ‘angry and warlike yells’⁴² that sounded deep from inside the vegetation, the sharp sticks ‘flying about’⁴³ coming at them through the air, and the ‘tangled gloom’ of ‘naked breasts, arms, legs’, and ‘glaring eyes’⁴⁴ that are suddenly discernable on the shore are all replaced by the men who call and wave, wade into the river and swim towards the *Nelly*, trying to ‘drag themselves on board’ before ‘grappling with the crew’. (p. 438) When Gregg fires a pistol round over their heads’ (p. 438) to scare them off just as Marlow jerks out ‘screech after screech hurriedly’ with the steamer whistle to frighten the natives, the map of shared features is, at least momentarily, complete.

The scene that faces Bridgeman and the others when on shore is, unlike that which confronts Marlow, one of overwhelming chaos and disruption. Gone is the ‘long decaying building [...] half buried in the high grass’.⁴⁵ Gone is also the Russian dressed as a harlequin,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴² Ibid., p. 46.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

and vanished are the 'half dozen slim posts' completed with 'round curved balls',⁴⁶ that are horrifyingly revealed by Marlow to be dismembered heads. In their place is instead a decaying church, two Finns in dire need of herring and lorry tyres, as well as a large quantity of cable and telephone poles. Just as Marlow's steamer repairs were delayed by an absence of rivets, the work on the telephone lines is halted by the absence of much needed lorry spares. The Finns are at the mercy of colonial administration, but much as Marlow finds at the Central Station, it has failed. Just as was the case with Conrad's brickmaker, the Scandinavians have found their place in the wilderness and have the ability to carry out the task allotted to them, yet similarly they lack the means to do so. The senselessness of Conrad's Central Station, with its seemingly irrational management and charge devoid of practical reasoning, is united with exoticism of the Inner Station as Kunzru's description evolves into an increasingly comic parody of settlement life. On much the same note as Conrad, Kunzru has set out to describe the grossly unwelcome additions to the life of the African natives as well as the landscape of the continent. In the form of a 'mean little village', (p. 438) a miniature of the civilizations found in western models, commentary is offered with the poignant portrayal of European destructiveness:

For perhaps half a mile in every direction, is a makeshift camp. People swarm about, cooking food, washing, collecting water or simply huddling together in disconsolate groups. For some distance in either direction the river bank has been denuded of vegetation. Everything combustible has been gathered up. (p. 438)

Bereft of Conradian mysticism, the humorously devised settlement at the river's end may primarily be construed as Kunzru's very own attempt at critiquing the evils of colonial settlements upon the lands themselves, as well as a sly commentary in more general terms upon the evils of foreign rule. Showing his dislike for the conduct of the Belgians in the Congo, Conrad effectively included aspects which would allow for the questioning of imperialist method, yet evident with the many ambiguities of *Heart of Darkness*, their employment remained largely complacent. When subjected to Kunzru's program of critical elaboration, precisely this indefinite suggestiveness is time again redeveloped to favour a particular avenue of interpretation. Exemplified by the station Kunzru allows to emerge at the end of the Chapel expedition steam journey, what may formerly have been traits which would yield with little resistance to an anti-colonial reading, with *The Impressionist* become aspects undeniably integral to the latter author's discourse of postcolonial opposition. With his use of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Conrad, not only does Kunzru, as John Thieme puts it, locate ‘the text in relation’⁴⁷ to its predecessor, but he makes certain to amend it to the point that there is little doubt which particular agenda the revisions are in service of.

In search of authority, the Fotseland anthropologists begin to make enquiries among those they encounter on the bank. Sharing much of Marlow’s sinister anticipation, Kunzru’s English expedition is little aware what or whom they will come to face. There is no longer a single name on everyone’s lips and the crowds of savages have vanished. Still, the ‘absurd danger of the situation’⁴⁸ remains alongside a shared sense of imminent revelation. The Finns warn that he, the figure who awaits them, may have to be hit several times in order to gain consciousness. With trepidation growing, they are soon to come face to face, and simultaneously, Kunzru is on the brink of establishing a final yet almost unavoidable link to Conrad’s novella. Inside the ruins of a converted church, in the space of the altar, resides the man responsible for the Fotseland settlement:

His name is Short and he’s the bloody government around here and every other thing besides and if they want to give him a hard time about it they might as well come outside and fight. In the yard, after a bucket of river water has been poured over his head, he is a sorry sight, his eyes milky and unfocused, his skin a battlefield of broken veins and insect bites. He is a young man, not much older than Jonathan, but whisky and fever have wrecked him completely. He looks at the circle of anthropologists and cracks a smile over a mouth of black and mossy teeth. ‘Jesus’, he says. ‘You’re real. I thought I’d made you up.’ (p. 441)

In partly recognizable form, Conrad’s enigmatic Kurtz, the premier reference to *Heart of Darkness* alongside the jungle river itself, makes a somewhat predictable appearance in *The Impressionist*. Though largely removed from many of the qualities attributed to this very same figure in the tale Marlow shares with his Thames audience, it is clearly the remnants of Kurtz Kunzru’s expedition members are introduced to in the form of the initially disagreeable District Officer. The man who is discovered within the confines of the decaying building, dying but not yet dead, shares with Conrad’s character the battle scars of prolonged exposure to the harsh tropic elements, the incapacitation that has come as a result of illness, as well as what to most purposes is the very same name:

Kurtz – Kurtz – that means ‘short’ in German – don’t it? Well, the name was true as everything else in life – and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of ivory had been shakings

⁴⁷ Thieme, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Conrad, p. 59.

its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly.⁴⁹

As a vastly edited Kurtz, Kunzru's redeveloped character stands very much in aid of any interpretation that would favour the view of the white colonizers as ultimately incapable of the ventures they so eagerly pursued, incompetent, disillusioned, and desperately out of place in a hostile environment ruled not by mankind but nature itself. Opposed to Kurtz, Short, the 'disembodied English voice' (p. 441) coming from within a dark room, accordingly stands forth as a particularly illustrative example of Kunzru's oppositional amendments as this character in essence contradicts many of the key characteristics attributed to Conrad's famous counterpart. As with much else in *Heart of Darkness*, the matter of Kurtz himself is left largely unresolved and appears to be a subject of which Conrad is highly evasive. In Marlow's renderings, an account is made of some of his actions, evidence is provided that would similarly allow for an opinion of him as a hero as well as delinquent and misguided genius, yet a clear view is always held back at the last moment as the views of the Manager as well as the Russian repeatedly contradict those of Marlow. With Kunzru, however, the reverse is the case. Without a differing voice to contend with, the portrayal of Short is one of unanimous ridicule as the proverbial aura of colonial mystery that surrounds Kurtz by means of at times flamboyant reworkings is piece by piece torn apart. As a figure of enigmatic mystery, Kurtz is utterly demystified as the character portrayed in *The Impressionist* is little other than a drunken shell, a man who falls out of bed and surrounds himself with bad language, sharing, one might add, none of Kurtz's oratorical skills as he during weaker moments is beyond even the composition of intelligible sentences. While Marlow is instructively told of Kurtz as a man to whom one listens rather than speaks, Kunzru's incarnation seems a man to whom one speaks but from whom one does not expect a coherent reply. Also vanished is the obsession with ivory and the river station alongside the stern sense of authority, and in its place is a highly undernourished desire for white women in addition to a clearly absent ability to perform any sort of action. Short is, as Kunzru imparts, barely capable of feeding himself and much less able to perform even a menial task such as notifying the local emir of the Chapel expedition's arrival. Predictably, the responsibility of getting across a message falls on someone else, as the District Officer retains abysmally little hope of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

gaining lucidity for a time long enough to perform this duty. With Kunzru, Conrad's Kurtz appears to have become entirely incapacitated.

Decidedly a result of Kunzru's playful games with recognized colonial stereotypes, Short has come to be symbolic of many things that Kurtz was not. Though only present in Kunzru's narrative for few pages, examples of Short's degeneration appear in abundance, causing the otherworldliness of Kurtz to reappear subverted in an elaborate patchwork of shortcomings with the former cause of reverence and speculation ultimately fit for very little else than mockery, humiliation, and embarrassment. Largely by means of redeveloping well chosen traits conceivably latent though not prominent in Kurtz, features of semblance are attributed new, conflicting meanings. No longer the all-important target at the river's end, nor the personification of overstepped colonialist boundaries, the significance of Short appears to reside primarily in the function of this character as an inversion of the many symbolic implications particular to Conrad's Kurtz. As Parry advocates so strongly in her study of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz may be viewed as a man 'impersonating imperialism's will to expand its domain over the earth and all its creatures',⁵⁰ as well as a first rate example of colonialist exploitation. Short, therefore, when offered in comparison to Kurtz, does to a great extent cause the uncovering of Kunzru's oppositional steps as what is epitomized with the later character, is much the reverse of that captured with the earlier. Symbolised by Short, imperialism has lost its will to rule and is no longer in control of itself and much less its subjects. In the text of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz emerges almost as an apparition of colonialist mythology, while with *The Impressionist* Short leaves a lasting impression of trivial obnoxiousness coupled with abysmal failure. Though a central feature of Conrad's character, it remains unclear whether any form of colonial accomplishment may be attributed to that of Kunzru. Unlike with his Conradian counterpart who is told to have taken possession of the land, its people, and its wealth, the mention of any successful undertakings appear somewhat outside the scope of Kunzru as they would not contribute to the portrayal of imperialist failure so apparent in this section of *The Impressionist*.

Most significantly, *The Impressionist* parts ways with *Heart of Darkness* as the anthropologist expedition at last is able to leave behind the destruction of 'Short's Landing' and begin the final leg of the journey to the much awaited Fotse settlements – the heart of Africa proper. Reminiscent of the 'Eldorado Exploring Expedition',⁵¹ Marlow comes to observe during his stay at the Central Station, the swaying figure of Professor Chapel upon a

⁵⁰ Parry, p. 29.

⁵¹ Conrad, p. 30.

camel's back leads the party even further into the wilderness, much in the style of the visitation 'headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes'⁵² present in Conrad. Once again, Bridgeman travels with misgivings regarding what lay ahead, as echoing the liaison of the Russian trader with Kurtz, he too has been privy to private interviews with Short and learned of his experiences deep within the interior. Though Marlow travels back to the coast plagued by Kurtz' deathbed talk of 'the horror',⁵³ traces of Conrad's often quoted words are found in Short's repeated yet imprecise insistence that something is amiss further up the river which plagues Jonathan as he heads off in search for the Fotse. Through a whisky haze and with constant confusion over 'the fortunes of the Kent county cricket team', the only thing intelligible through Short's confused rambling is one single returning phrase: 'Bad show up there', (p. 443) he says over and over again.

Much as the site of Fresleven's killing, the first Fotse homesteads the anthropologist come across are deserted. The previously pristine farming tribe have, at least for no reason immediately apparent to the anthropologist, fled to the nearby caves. Though the native ceremony, witnessed by Bridgeman and Gittens, in which the Fotse perform their mimicry act constitutes yet another sly nod to Conrad and the ritual to which Marlow and Kurtz become spectators, the final pages of *The Impressionist* are largely dissimilar to those of its predecessor. Marlow, of course, returns to Europe, while the Chapel expedition, albeit with the exception of Bridgeman, is killed. Illustrative of Kunzru's practice is again that the many things only suggested or hinted at with Conrad are in fact allowed to take place in *The Impressionist*, as in this instance Kunzru portrays the savage reality of a colonial nightmare left only to the imagination of the reader in *Heart of Darkness*. One of the colonizer's greatest fears, though strongly alluded to by Conrad, is fulfilled as the white men are slain by natives, yet simultaneously, the sparing of Bridgeman's life proves a point of interest as it, like many things before, constitutes a curious amendment to Conrad's Kurtz. The tribe's people of Conrad's African villages did not want Kurtz to leave, and just as Jonathan, he was the only one to be removed from the peril of their arrows, knives, and spears. The sole reason for the escape of Kunzru's protagonist from the wrath of the Fotse is that the Africans are able to see past his white facade and recognize him for the colonial subject deep within, penetrating the surface of his well played role as western colonizer. The oriental residing within has saved him from death, yet ambiguously, the character that emerges at the novel's close is neither

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 69.

white nor black but, somewhat paradoxically, an indeterminable blankness - a figure of a divided world caught in the flux between the pulls of identities.

With Kunzru, the voyage into the darkness of the African continent has ultimately become a ritual of passing very much the opposite of that found in Conrad. For as the dark evil of the jungle takes possession of Kurtz's soul, the same voyage allows Bridgeman to become rid of his evil 'European spirit' (p. 475) and offers a haven of redemption from the misconduct he is guilty of having posed as white man. Though the many paradoxes of *Heart of Darkness* remain, the divisions between peoples, nations, and continents become lost in the blur of Kunzru's protagonist. What resides within the body formerly inhabited by Bridgeman at the novel's end is a being lost within an infinite paradox of race affiliation and identity, a character that in an uncanny yet strangely encompassing manner is able to be all and nothing at the very same time. While 'all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz',⁵⁴ the entire world seems to have contributed to the forming of Kunzru's protagonist as what remains of him on the novel's final page is a figure not only emblematic of the futures that have come to India and Africa since they came to be immortalised in the narratives of the earlier writes, but of the changed world that has come into being during the latter half of the twentieth century. Bridgeman has, to borrow a term from Hall, been moulded in the form of the 'the modern or postmodern New World nomad',⁵⁵ a figure who through countless processes of 'dispersal and fragmentation'⁵⁶ has come to be trapped in a pendulum like existence 'continually moving between centre and periphery'⁵⁷ of the British Empire. As Kunzru's impressionist makes his way through the sand, the journey has, as the author puts it, quite fittingly become 'everything'. (p. 481) Yet, through the thicket of racial confusion and lost identities, Kunzru makes a point he has strived to make already several times before: Identity is not, as Hall phrases it, 'as transparent or unproblematic as we think',⁵⁸ but rather a continuous cause of inner conflict, turmoil, and confusion for those irreparably marked by the mixings and shareings so frequently caused by western colonization.

It does, as Brantlinger adamantly argues, 'make sense to interpret *Heart of Darkness* as an attack on imperialism',⁵⁹ and clearly, such sentiments appear even more apposite in the case of *The Impressionist*. Where Conrad borderlines racist and imperialist ideology, Kunzru

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 110-121 (p. 119).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 119.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.110.

⁵⁹ Brantlinger, p. 197.

exaggerates these points beyond their literal significance in order to be able to place them within a postcolonial agenda, opposing and criticising the assumptions ambiguously present in *Heart of Darkness* by replacing Conrad's 'poetic allusion'⁶⁰ with much more explicit allegory. Where *Heart of Darkness* is able to offer only a voice of reserved scepticism, *The Impressionist* accordingly speaks a much clearer language of oppositional dissent largely by route of comedy and satirical amendment. Answers to the many questions that Conrad's novella 'refrains from answering'⁶¹ are, it seems, in most cases provided, and by dwelling on the many issues pertaining to imperialism which Conrad oftentimes undertook with only little reserve, the attitude towards imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* becomes almost a parody of its former self - no longer ambiguous but very sarcastic and with a strongly implied dislike of the European presence in Africa.

⁶⁰ C. B. Cox, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination* (London: J. M. Dent, 1974), p. 47.

⁶¹ Brantlinger, p. 198.

CONCLUSION

Quite clearly, it would be folly to believe that there is such a thing as a literary text that has come to be created in a vacuum entirely isolated from outer impulses, and that has not in some way benefited from that which has been written and read before. By the same coin, it is certain much beyond doubt that there have never been authors who have not had to read some texts or other, and in turn become influenced by them, before being able to produce something of their own. Harold Bloom makes this point very well when he in *A Map of Misreading* argues that poems ‘are neither about ‘subjects’ nor about ‘themselves’ as they necessarily are ‘about *other poems*’. A poem, according to Bloom, is ‘a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet’.¹ In order to become a poet, one must understand what poetry is, and to accomplish this, the poet must learn to imitate other poets. In this sense, Kunzru is by no means exemplary as he too has found inspiration in the works of others and learned to partially imitate them.

Much as has been demonstrated with *The Impressionist*, literature in most forms, when subjected to proper scrutiny, will as a consequence almost inevitably be found to occupy a place within a family tree of textual relations. Few works do, after all, entirely resist categorization along the highly generalized lines of style, form, and genre, and accordingly it will always be found that some texts have more in common than others, and that some serve to complement others in particular yet not always immediately obvious ways. In his account of the textual legacy of *Heart of Darkness* to Virgil, Dante, and Faust, Jakob Lothe emphasises the very same point in more specific terms, advocating that given texts can not only prove complementary, but also that they less generally might serve to ‘enhance their

¹ Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 18.

thematic import and interpretative suggestiveness.² Accordingly it stands to reason, as Lothe also suggests, that certain combinations of texts ‘may be more interesting and relevant than others’,³ and that certain avenues of comparative study could prove to be more rewarding than some. Through decades if not centuries of literary studies, this, it seems, has never proved a significant topic of controversy. Taken for granted more often than not, the notion that reading texts in light of others is productive, and that there, as Susan Bassnett also argues, ‘is immense value in studying literatures in terms of connections’,⁴ has in the present day become somewhat of an established assumption.

Whatever form they take, literary studies of today appear to endorse the notion that there always will reside an element of the comparative at the heart of their endeavour. One need, for instance, only think of the common ways in which university courses and curriculums are organized to see that texts to a greater or lesser extent are best viewed in context: With Virginia Woolf, for instance, placed safely in the column opposite James Joyce and John Donne on the line just below George Herbert, one may rest assured that the common affinity for metaphysics of the renaissance poets is not lost on the students, as well as many of the traits so common to the modernist movement, underlining, it would seem, the point that these aspects become more obvious when the works are viewed in light of appropriate others. Similarly, few critics seem to willingly surpass the opportunity to situate a published text in relation to those which have preceded it, much as academics for good reason are invariably compelled to indicate some form of textual kinship when referring to any given text. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. The main point is rather that there is an almost incessant inclination for comparison, a firm belief in the fact that the task of ‘comparing and contrasting’ is a safe route of study, and that reading works that share common traits on one level or the other can be beneficial to one another when read together. With the evident benefits of reading Kunzru alongside Forster, Kipling, and Conrad demonstrated in the foregoing pages, the three chapters of this thesis have, if anything, gone some way to strengthen this particular conviction.

In whichever guise it may come to appear, the survey of textual interconnectivity will always be limited by individual opinion as well as agenda, and can, as Harish Trivedi rightly

² Jakob Lothe, ‘Cumulative Intertextuality in “Heart of Darkness”’: Virgil, Dante, and Goethe’s Faust’ in *Conrad at the Millennium: Modernism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism*, ed. by Gail Fincham and others (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 177-96 (p. 177).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴ Susan Bassnett, ‘Influence and Intertextuality: A Reappraisal’ *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43.2 (2007) in *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 20 April 2009], pp. 134-46 (p.145).

points to in his study of the influence of western literature upon Indian literature, like much else be thwarted by readings inclined to find ‘influence everywhere’ as well as those ‘either reluctant to see’, or eager to ‘play it down’.⁵ Clearly, this brings to light a potential weakness hereditary to almost any comparative study, and one that is also applicable to this thesis. Any reader, based on personal interest, educational background or simply critical disposition, will in analysis very often stand in danger of attributing undue importance to certain aspects of any given text as it will always speak in different voices to different audiences. Though it may well be the task of a particular reading to place emphasis among those elements which stand in favour of the argument presented, it nonetheless remains somewhat problematic that there, in a manner of speaking, is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ to the practice of literary interpretation as there hardly exists a conclusion, however well argued, that cannot in some way or other be surpassed by another. Ultimately, there is after all little to say that the works chosen as grounds for comparison, though perhaps the most obvious, are any the more valuable or meaningful than any less obvious, more distantly related, texts. In the same manner in which Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, and Goethe’s *Faust* are all present in *Heart of Darkness*, they are arguably also present in *The Impressionist*, and as Gene M. Moore repeatedly serves to remind us, there are in addition to these also many other twentieth century works that also bear the marks of Conradian influence, and that by the strength of this alone stand as potentially productive partners of comparison. Based even on this limited example, there are, it would seem, no clear beginnings or ends to textual relations. Accordingly, it must therefore be remembered that the foregoing has been a charter of only the immediate textual relations of Kunzru’s novel, and that while the chapters of this thesis will hopefully have been able to offer some clarification with the regard to the more specific aspects of Kunzru’s efforts, the works chosen for comparison with view to exploring the novel’s postcolonial reworkings must still be considered to be only three of what to most purposes are an infinite number of relations that theoretically could also have come into contention as subjects fit for a comparative study of *The Impressionist*. Though the argument in the preceding that the works of Forster, Kipling, and Conrad enjoy an elevated position in *The Impressionist* has been successful to the extent that these authors have become marked as worthy venues of comparative study, they are nonetheless not exclusive as there are also other

⁵ Harish Trivedi, ‘Colonial Influence, Postcolonial Intertextuality: Western Literature and Indian Literature’ *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43.2 (2007) in *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 20 April 2009], pp. 121-33 (p.127).

competitors for this title who would prove to be similarly compelling contenders, even though they, in the context of this enquiry, at best remain peripheral.

There shall always be, as Moore advocates again in the context of Conrad, ‘writers who have acknowledged their debts’ to the earlier authors, as well as ‘parallels and resemblances that seem too striking to be accidental’, yet when it is time for final analysis one comes to realise with some disbelief that there really are no satisfactory ‘terms with which to measure the strength of influence.’⁶ Even when looking back at the discussion of this thesis, this difficulty is clearly illustrated by the vast selection of words used to describe the various instances of textual commonalities. Diverse in tone, specificity, as well as content, the vocabulary utilised to convey the many points of textual common ground form a pattern of words ranging from the tacit to the explicit, illustrative of the features they describe, yet simultaneously pointing to the many degrees of textual connectedness. In the context of *The Impressionist*, this has proved to be of particular interest as not only does Kunzru’s novel contain many of the widespread reference forms which prove variously open to interpretation, but more importantly, it includes a selection of references that also in varying form - initially by means of easy recognition, but also by means of their evident significance to the novel’s agenda of postcolonial opposition - link the text almost unmistakeably to various aspects, sections, and extracts of *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and of course *Heart of Darkness*. The cave in the opening chapter, the life and times of Kunzru’s young hybrid protagonist at the novel’s centre, as well as the jungle expedition at its end are not only similar, but they mirror their earlier counterparts from the colonial canon to the point that there remains hardly any doubt about which texts Kunzru is attempting to invoke in the minds of his reading audience. This mode of reference may well be the mark of modern day prose satire, it could easily be called a case of overt influence, or perhaps even labelled as a particular form of intertextuality. Still, the significant fact remains that the detection of the earlier texts within *The Impressionist* may not only be perceived as a welcome addition to the experience of the reading audience that conveniently happens to yield to academic pursuits such as this thesis, but rather as an aspect integral to the actual reading experience itself. The recognition of the fact that the earlier colonial works are present, it seems, has become almost a necessity for the reader to fully appreciate the full significance of the novel. For, without having studied these three additional ‘guidebooks’, the pages of *The Impressionist*, though not removed entirely from their role as

⁶ Gene M. Moore, ‘Conrad’s Influence’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 223-41 (p. 224).

means of entertainment, will quite clearly come to mean something rather different as much of Kunzru's otherwise evident postcolonial opposition would be lost.

What makes *The Impressionist* stand apart from other works perhaps equally guilty of literary borrowings, then, is that it wears its textual ancestry on its sleeve, making no secret of the fact that *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness* have all been interwoven in the narrative, and in many ways flaunts the fact that they have been. Great subtlety in the propagation of past works, it would appear, has at very few crossroads been a major concern for Kunzru, and this, quite clearly, has not been without reason. Though of course not a feat achieved by Kunzru's novel alone, *The Impressionist* alongside selected other works marks a firm break with the anxieties about literary genius and the diminishing 'literary value' associated with textual affiliation in the past so common to western literature, and has instead taken a page from the book of the first Indian authors who wrote in English, holding the view of influence, in the words of Harish Trivedi, 'as a badge of distinction' and as a 'term of high praise'.⁷ No longer present in the form of unavoidable yet equally unintentional references, the clearly intentional presence of Forster, Kipling, and Conrad in the case of Kunzru may among other things be construed as a ploy for attention, a device that might be hoped to intrigue the reader and spur him or her on through the novel's pages, or perhaps as a feature at which the discerning critic may point a learned finger of authentication and exclaim that there is something overly familiar about the text; a trait that brings to it something of value, but that also goes a way to mark it as a worthy though largely oppositional descendant of its literary forefathers. With *The Impressionist*, Kunzru has shown that recycling of the literary past is in no way a bad thing, but rather an effective method of opposing and critiquing the earlier texts as well as a way of attracting even more firmly the attention of readers acquainted with the English colonial canon. *The Impressionist* is, in short, a novel that sits comfortably on the shoulders of its predecessors for the entire world to see without being ashamed of it, demonstrating that the days of influence tracing as a measure of literary achievement or value have well and truly gone, and that instead a new era has been entered where influence of some form has become recognized as an approved and unavoidable given, and where the almost uninhibited reuse of past writings has become a mark of value in itself. Seemingly, with the likes of Kunzru, merit appears no longer to be found in the distance to literature past and present, but rather in the advertised relationship between the authors and texts of any canon.

⁷ Trivedi, p. 127.

There are many ways in which Kunzru's achievements with *The Impressionist* may be characterised. With its subtle mix of episodic literary reworkings, postcolonial opposition, parody, black comedy, as well as magic realism, Haider is in no way wrong to call the novel a 'sly meditation'⁸ upon its predecessors, nor, of course, is Mendelsohn when he in his review refers to it as 'disjointed collection of novellas'. Equally, it would by no means be a mistake to liken Kunzru's concoction of flamboyant fictional universes to, for instance, a pastiche such as those common to post-impressionist painters, and neither would one be in error to call *The Impressionist*, just as many have done Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a palimpsest novel. Though undoubtedly appropriate, the concept of parchments subjected to continual reuse commonly affiliated with the theories of Genette shares with the variety of other diverse descriptions an inability to illustrate Kunzru's efforts in their entirety. They may well be descriptive of many of the individual phenomena involved, yet only combined, it seems, do they come close to catering for the poignant extravagance found in *The Impressionist*.

A more fitting analogy still, albeit architectural, appears to have been supplied by Kunzru himself in the form of the New Palace at Fatehpur as it, much as the novel itself, is a particular blend of 'European and Oriental motifs' (p. 76) with its western inspired designs and eastern derived embellishments. Just as the Methwold estate of *Midnight's Children*, the western aspirations of Kunzru's palace bring to it something of the prestige formerly allocated to its models, yet the significance of the Fatehpur residence in the context of *The Impressionist* appears greater still as it clearly does much to ascribe a second, amended meaning to the highly recognizable symbols of British power and dominance that are so obviously integral to its design. By means of inversion, exaggeration, and juxtaposition, the palace at Fatehpur does much as *The Impressionist* itself not only allow for the re-emergence of central symbols and concepts, but consequently also for the alteration of their past meanings. For removed from the context of their original milieu, the strongly revised yet still central architectural features as a result become a symbol of eastern achievement rather than western dominance, and accordingly, much as is repeatedly the case with the text itself, the significance of the past is by means of easily detectable similarity altered within recognition to serve a new, oppositional cause. By placing recognizable motifs within an 'adversarial discourse'⁹ and allowing for them to reappear within a highly revised context, Kunzru, it would seem, has done a great deal to unsettle the chosen texts of the colonial canon. For when read alongside *The Impressionist*, the heavily canonised but also highly memorable events of

⁸ Haider, p. 122.

⁹ Thieme, p. 3.

A Passage to India, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness* become not just parodies of their former selves, but also devices which serve to undermine the very system that in due course made for their creation. To many purposes, therefore, Kunzru's postcolonial strategy has resulted in a text which is not just a revised, collective reading of a selection of traditional English literary texts, but more importantly, it is a text that is acutely aware of the many values and assumptions that contributed to the making of its literary predecessors; a product, much as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin observe regarding postcolonial texts in general, of a changed world 'in which it is no longer possible to preserve repositories of a fixed and immutable system of values'.¹⁰

What binds *The Impressionist* so strongly to the texts of Forster, Kipling, and Conrad, then, may largely be confined to a common preoccupation with the results of colonial rule exemplified by the conditions found in British India as well as Belgian Congo. As other postcolonial writers before him, Kunzru has found *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness* such easily adaptable texts because they in some form offer traces of the very same attitudes that have later become central to postcolonialism, aspects that with only an appropriate amount of encouragement can be made to emerge in reworked, oppositional, form. Certainly for Kunzru, the project of postcolonial opposition in many ways emerges as a project of clarification with a great deal of the questions posed but left unanswered by the colonial texts - the 'postcolonial' aspirations of his predecessors - finally receiving tentative answers as they are now liberated from the confines of colonialism. At face value, many of Kunzru's suggestions may seem as outrageous as they are spectacular, yet in spite of this the novel succeeds in showing the instability of the written text, or to be more precise, the imperialist colonial discourses. Contending, as it does, the content of the past texts as a 'stable, given or unrivalled medium',¹¹ as well as ascribing very much to what Trivedi refers to as 'the urgent oppositional political impulse that initially underlay the postcolonial',¹² *The Impressionist* appears striking in that it in the course of its seven chapters makes an attempt to approach a great many of the concepts most central to postcolonialism. As has been demonstrated in the foregoing, few stones are left untouched if not unturned by Kunzru with topics such as race, identity, and mimicry oftentimes taking centre stage. Though the primary intention of this thesis has never been to explore Kunzru's postcolonial accomplishments in any other way than in terms of their function as part of an intertextual undertaking, this focus

¹⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 191.

¹¹ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 172.

¹² Trivedi, p. 130.

has nonetheless led to the realisation that these two highly prominent aspects of the novel are very closely related. Viewed as individual efforts, it might be claimed that Kunzru has not proved exemplary in terms of either postcolonial or intertextual achievement as there are many who have achieved similar feats before him. However, when viewed in light of what may be called postcolonial intertextuality, the significance of *The Impressionist* as both a contribution to the exchange of literary imperialist critique as well as a postcolonial amendment to the colonial canon, is, as will hopefully have been shown, much clearer.

Standing on the frontier of postcolonialism face to face with the immensity of imperialist writing, Kunzru has navigated the battlefields of words, images, and symbols, creating for a new age a revised edition of three prominent colonial texts, but also contributed to a derivative form that in due course has proved able to cater for the multifariousness of a postcolonial world filled to the rim with hybrid, melting pot cultures. Somewhat of a hybrid itself, *The Impressionist* seemingly strives to comment upon the prospects of a future and, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have put it, ‘increasingly globalized’¹³ world, where the boundaries of colour and race are no longer in place to maintain the traditional order, but where the countless peoples and nationalities are steadily amalgamated into one separate entity. If, as Cedric Watts has argued, Conrad with *Heart of Darkness* was able to pre-empt the First World War with its destruction facilitated by ‘man-made organizations and technology’ as well as ‘Hitlerism and the holocaust’,¹⁴ Kunzru, it seems, building upon the inherent scepticism of Kipling and Forster, is doing something to anticipate the future of the multicultural societies that have blossomed in the aftermath of imperialism. In many ways representative of the state of affairs found on the doorsteps of the twenty first century, Pran Nath, Rukhsana, Pretty Bobby, and Jonathan Bridgeman all appear highly illustrative of the fading divides, but also of the pitfalls that may come to face an increasingly diverse populations as they strive to correct the misdoing of past centuries. Moreover, where Francis Ford Coppola with *Apocalypse Now* saw fit to apply Conrad’s African myth as a means of commentary upon the Vietnam War, Kunzru appears to be offering a warning also regarding the dangers of overt assimilation by means of the almost miraculous adaptations of his protagonist. Based on the example of Professor Chapel who is fazed by a world ‘filling up with analogies’ and packed with ‘chains of resemblance’, (p. 395) *The Impressionist* does much to favour the view that similarity may only be fortuitous up to a given point, and much

¹³ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 222.

¹⁴ Cedric Watts, ‘Heart of Darkness’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 45-62 (p. 50).

as the text itself to a degree has been forced to assimilate in order to establish a link to earlier writers, the likes of Kunzru's protagonist are cautioned that complete mimicry of established models does not necessarily constitute the best of routes to self betterment.

The Impressionist, then, is not only an attempt to mirror highlights from the colonial canon, but also to create a reflection of the postcolonial world itself. In an age more packed with venues of 'interconnectedness' than ever before, be they cultural, literary, or otherwise, redistribution and redevelopment are not only a common mode of operation, but would rather seem to have become almost the norm. Cultural recycling is, according to Orr, 'among postmodernism's key dynamics',¹⁵ and though this statement first and foremost has been made in terms of literary phenomenon, its implications also seem to reflect upon the commonplace role of mimicry as well as hybridity in postcolonial texts, but also, it would seem, the formerly colonized peoples themselves from whom these concepts originate. In the context of *The Impressionist*, the postcolonial has therefore come to share something with the postmodern by virtue of a mutual role in the evolvement of cultural representation, with postcolonial cultures bringing to the table a motif, and postmodernism a model of literary conveyance. In his discussion of intertextuality and its role within postmodernism, Manfred Pfister argues that not only has intertextuality 'become the very trademark of postmodernism', but it has also been 'one of the most influential propagators, if not the inventor',¹⁶ of postmodernism itself. It is striking, therefore, that in the case of *The Impressionist*, postcolonialism, by route of postmodernism, consequently leads back to matters of intertextuality as Kunzru, by means of what therefore is postmodern method, appears to have has been able to criticise and oppose much of imperialism alongside the texts it contributed to produce with his particular blend of postcolonialism and intertextuality.

Based within the findings of this thesis, it is clear that *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *Heart of Darkness* have done a great deal to facilitate the form as well as lasting significance of *The Impressionist*. To a greater extent, it has been shown what Forster, Kipling, and Conrad have done for Kunzru, but also what Kunzru has done for them as the evident textual relationship, though not co-dependent, has proved to be mutually beneficial as the literary predecessors have provided a venue for Kunzru's postcolonial opposition while *The Impressionist* has given rise to a renewed interest in the elder colonial works. More probably than not, Kunzru has, so to speak, had the most to gain from engaging in this relationship, yet

¹⁵ Orr, p. 95.

¹⁶ Manfred Pfister, 'How Postmodern is Intertextuality?' in *Research in Text Theory: Intertextuality*, ed. by Heinrich F. Plett (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 207-23 (p. 209).

his attempt at revisiting such a prominent literary heritage has arguably also added to the future influence of both parties. Amongst a great deal else and in spite of its critical agenda, Kunzru's novel must after all also be considered a tribute to three famous authors who have all enjoyed a prominent place within the public imagination for in the region of a century; a means of paying homage that offers a sight of renewal and that calls for 'the past to be added to the future',¹⁷ but also a testimony to the returning value of the old. By seeking empowerment in the writings of the past, *The Impressionist* has, to borrow a phrase from Bloom, sought to strive toward the 'correction of a past idea', but also advocated the wish to continue 'beyond a predecessor'.¹⁸ Much as this thesis has attempted to add a slightly new perspective to already well studied works and theories, Kunzru too puts forth a new reading or interpretation of much discussed texts, yet the difference remains that unlike Kunzru's work of fiction, academic texts are rightly bound by the need for academic humility, objectivity, and fact. However, though this thesis may never aspire to anything greater than being considered a reasonable argued study in its own right, Kunzru may, it seems, have set his targets somewhat higher as though a place in posterity next to Forster, Kipling, and Conrad may not be within reach, a position a little lower in the literary hierarchy may be an attainable goal. While the pages of this thesis may look forward to years on a library shelf, the main ambition for the future of *The Impressionist* must be for it to be remembered, if not alongside, then somewhere in the vicinity of its literary forefathers. What may be hoped for is that the impression that has been made on the cultural imagination - the legacy particular to Kunzru's postcolonial games - has been great enough so that for years to come, it will be recalled that the presence of an Indian cave, a hybrid boy, and a river in Africa almost by definition refer to Forster, Conrad, and Kipling, but also that they combined may point to something a little different; namely a book called *The Impressionist* written by an author named Hari Kunzru.

¹⁷ Orr, p. 87.

¹⁸ Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 14.

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